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Queer(ing) Politics and Practices: Contemporary Art in Homonationalist Times

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Graduate Program in Visual Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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**Queer(ing) Politics and Practices:
Contemporary Art in Homonationalist Times**

(Thesis format: Integrated Article)

by

Cierra Alexandra Webster

Graduate Program in Visual Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This project investigates homonationalism through three different art practices. Briefly, homonationalism is a term to articulate the imbricated systems of contemporary mainstream LGBT politics and nationalist politics. The first article, *Queering the Canon: Museum Politics and Hide/Seek at the Smithsonian*, unpacks the first major exhibition of gay artwork in America as an example of homonationalist processes in the United States. The second article, entitled *Colonial Queeries: Centering a Two-Spirit Critique of Homonationalism*, analyses Canadian artist Kent Monkman's paintings and focuses on the political potential of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. *(Pink)Washing the Conflict in Zero Degrees of Separation* is the third article that looks at Elle Flanders's critique of Israeli homonationalism through her 2005 documentary film.

Keywords

Homonationalism, contemporary art, queer theory, cultural studies, sexuality, politics, LGBT, museum studies, settler colonialism, pinkwashing

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Introduction

People are different from each other.
- Eve Sedgwick¹

Today, big things happened. I put aside writing my thesis to watch the news and surf the Internet because today, on June 26th 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States of America saw two landmark cases supposedly enshrining LGBT rights in America. The Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act as unconstitutional – a law signed in 1996 deeming that a marriage is between a man and a woman – *and* dismissed Proposition 8 – a same-sex marriage ban in California. Massive crowds of people, who had been waiting outside the Supreme Court in Washington, DC, erupted in cheers and tears (**fig. 0.01**). Many politicians, celebrities, academics, activists, and protesters rejoiced. Newspaper articles and blogs toted headlines reading “Supreme celebrations after court tosses DOMA, Prop 8,”² “Supreme court gives two big victories for gay rights,”³ “DOMA Dead, Love Lives,”⁴ and “Today is a good day to be a gay American.”⁵

But today was not a good day to be a gay American for everyone. During this same week, also in Washington, DC, five transgender women and drag queens were

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 325.

² Michael K. Lavers, “Supreme celebrations after court tosses DOMA, Prop 8,” *Washington Blade*, June 26 2013. <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2013/06/26/same-sex-marriage-supporters-celebrate-doma-prop-8-rulings/>, accessed June 26 2013.

³ CNN Staff, “Supreme court gives two big victories for gay rights,” *The Dallas Weekly*, June 26 2013. http://www.dallasweekly.com/politics/national/article_89b045c0-de8e-11e2-856c-001a4bcf6878.html, accessed June 26 2013.

⁴ Katie Grunewald, “DOMA Dead, Love Lives,” *Iowa State Daily*, June 27 2013. http://www.iowastatedaily.com/news/article_cf3f77c0-dea0-11e2-a55e-001a4bcf887a.html, accessed July 3 2013.

⁵ Hilton Hater, “True Blood Celebrates Supreme Court Rulings on DOMA, Prop 8,” *The Hollywood Gossip*, June 26 2013. <http://www.thehollywoodgossip.com/2013/06/true-blood-celebrates-supreme-court-rulings-on-doma-prop-8/>, accessed June 26 2013.

beaten, stabbed, shot, and killed. These attacks and murders were unrelated and not considered hate crimes. Instead, the local section of *The Washington Times* printed a small article that warranted eleven comments.⁶ These horrendous crimes were not national news. No other news source took up this story, possibly because the murder of trans⁷ persons and drag queens is not newsworthy. After all, statistically, it has been claimed that one in twelve trans person will be murdered. Or, your chances of being murdered are one in eight if you are a trans woman of colour.⁸ Remarkably, yet tellingly, on a day in which purportedly everyone could participate in the hoopla that followed the Supreme Court rulings, the continuation of hate crimes against LGBT persons failed to gain media traction. These two events on opposite ends of the spectrum happened at the same time and in the same place. I texted my friends saying, “Boy, my thesis feels relevant today” because this is just one snapshot of the queer times in which we live. This is the storied relationship of homonationalism.

My thesis explores the contemporary phenomenon known as ‘homonationalism’ through three different art practices. Working within the integrated-article stream, I seek to understand homonationalism and its nuances through the *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute, Kent Monkman’s

⁶ Andrea Noble, “Attacks on Transgender Women Not Seen as Related,” *The Washington Times*, June 28 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/28/three-recent-attacks-concern-dc-transgender-commun/?page=all>, accessed July 3 2013.

⁷ Trans is an overarching term for persons whose biological sex organs does not match their gender identity. Trans includes various non-gender conforming identities, such as transsexual, transgender, gender fluid, gender queer, third gender, or agender. Contrastingly, cisgender refers to the persons for whom their biological sex matches their gender identity.

⁸ This is a widely cited statistic but its accuracy has recently been questioned. For instance, Christina Stephens searches for sources to support it but cannot confirm it, see <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wwjtd/2012/05/murder-statistics-of-transgender-people/>. Nevertheless, the rate of violence against trans persons is grossly underreported. For sources on this, turn to Walter Bockting, Gail Knudson, and Joshua Mira Goldberg, “Counseling and Mental Health Care of Transgender Adults and Loved Ones,” Transcend Transgender Support & Education Society and Vancouver Coastal Health’s Transgender Health Program (January 2006) <http://transhealth.vch.ca/resources/library/tcpdocs/guidelines-mentalhealth.pdf>, accessed July 18 2013.

paintings, and Elle Flanders's film *Zero Degrees of Separation*. Briefly, the first article looks at the politics and projects that led to the curation of *Hide/Seek*, the first major exhibition of LGBT artwork in America. I reveal that the only way that this exhibition could be shown was to use homonationalist projects in the United States in an attempt to queer the canon. Moving north of the 49th parallel, the second article studies the implications of Kent Monkman's paintings as a potential site of queering settler homonationalist naturalizations in Canada. In other words, Monkman's paintings open a space for criticizing binaries, normativities, and created histories. Lastly, the third article situates *Zero Degrees of Separation* in a critique of homonationalist and pinkwashing discourse. Through shedding light on the historical founding of Israel and contemporary Israeli behaviour toward Palestinians, this film underscores a queered understanding of the intersections of nation, sexuality, and history. Each article therefore examines homonationalism through a different lens, ultimately helping us understand this process more completely. The case studies range from examining the way a queer show was curated, to using a Two-Spirit critique to unsettle homonationalism's binaries, to looking at a film that explores the treatment of Palestinians and pinkwashing.

To familiarize my readers with the methodology that I analyse in my thesis, this introduction will begin with a literature review of queer theory, homonormativity, and homonationalism. I then move into a brief explanation of each article to tease out points of intersection among them. In the end, this project aims to trouble both the canon of art history along with a homonormative discussion of citizenship, in order to better understand the complexity of these queer times.

Reviewing Some Literature

Sex is always political.
- Gayle Rubin⁹

The foundations of queer studies began with Michel Foucault's 1978 work *A History of Sexuality*. In this text, Foucault analysed technologies of knowing as forms of power. Power, in this way, is understood as transitional movement, encompassing various forms of power that are concurrent and parallel. One way that power fluctuates is through people and discourse.

The History of Sexuality looked at historical repression and the explosion of discourse. In it, Foucault argued that there are discourses about population that allow certain types and techniques of control or policing, and this control has produced the societal ideal of a very regulated heterosexual couple. In particular, Foucault referenced pastoral handbooks as significant to an increase in both the frequency and level of detail with which people confess to their indiscretions. Foucault then used these recorded indiscretions as a historical source in his work. The increasing practice of confession, in conjunction with the development of notions of interiority, psychoanalysis, and the unconscious, came together with the study of sexual agency and difference. Often cited, Foucault noted that a homosexual identity was produced by society sometime around the year 1870.¹⁰ By historicizing gay identities in this way, *History of Sexuality* could be seen as a political act to legitimize LGBT histories and identities.

Following Foucault, Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" called for the beginnings of a new theoretical framework which

⁹ Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carole S. Vance, 143-178 (New York: Routledge, 1984)147.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 43.

centered queer identities and politics. Written in 1983, Rubin argued, “In the west, the 1880s, 1950s, and contemporary era have been periods of sex panic; Periods in which the state, the institutions of medicine, and the popular media have mobilized to attack and oppress all those sexual tastes that differ from those allowed by the currently dominative model of sexual correctness.”¹¹ As such, she maintained that we must begin theorizing sexuality in relation to ‘sex panic’ and heteronormativity.¹² Further, current feminist and Marxist discourse are insufficient in this analysis; instead, a new or different theory that centers sexual oppression needed to be developed. Thus, Rubin called for what she deemed a *radical* theory of sex, concluding, “It is time to recognize the political dimensions of erotic life.”¹³

In the year 1990, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick both produced texts that followed from Rubin’s call for a radical theory of sex. These texts are therefore often seen as the beginnings of queer theory. Butler’s *Gender Trouble* looked at the apparatuses producing sex and gender. She maintained that the conventional understanding that sex is biological and gender is socially constructed is flawed. Which means that, if gender is not necessarily attached to sex then there is no reason to maintain a distinction of two genders; rather, gender can be understood as fluid. Butler was also interested in how compulsory heterosexuality (or heteronormativity) constructs the relationship among sex, gender, and sexuality. To further explain this idea, Butler examined the ways in which these categories are distinctly understood depending on the dominant power, or hegemonic language.

¹¹ Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 3.

¹² Heteronormativity could use an entire thesis to explain, explore, and expand. However, brief, heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality is the expected and desirable sexual identity, and moreover the way that heterosexuality is constructed, maintained, and reproduced as the norm in society.

¹³ Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 35.

Importantly, Butler purported that “the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.”¹⁴ To say it again, gender is a performance. It is a doing. “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender.”¹⁵ In this way, Butler called for the denaturalization of heterosexuality. The power regimes of heteronormativity and patriarchy maintain their legitimacy through repetition and thus normalization.¹⁶ Therefore, if gender is inscribed in so many ways (hence the concept of repetition) then these sites of inscription can also be sites of contestation. As such, if gender is understood as “a process, a becoming, a constructing”¹⁷ then it is also a modality of deconstruction:

This text continues, then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.¹⁸

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) aimed to move sexuality studies to the centre of academia through an antihomophobia analysis. She wrote, “*Epistemology of the Closet* proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured – indeed, fractured – by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition.”¹⁹ Sedgwick maintained that we live in a culture of normative definitions and this understanding of sexuality as binary opposition is too simplistic. As a result, these

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 34.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

¹⁷ Ibid, 45.

¹⁸ Ibid, 46.

¹⁹ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1.

definitions must be reconceived as “irresolvably unstable,” or fluid.²⁰ However, this fluidity must be maintained and not codified by academia. Through writing about sexualities, Sedgwick reminded the reader that we “...still risk reinforcing a dangerous consensus of knowingness about the genuinely *unknown*” (original italics).²¹

Epistemology of the Closet followed Foucault with the position that there is an array of repressive discourses. Sedgwick noted that there is discursive formation to what can *not* be known, and she addressed the potency and danger of ignorance. In other words, there is an institutional privilege of not knowing and producing false knowledge. Therefore, new frameworks must be developed through which to talk about queer identity. Sedgwick remarked, “The project of the present book will be to show how issues of modern homo/heterosexual definition are structured, not only by the suppression of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times they do coexist.”²² Ultimately, Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* both called for a radical rethinking of the construction of identity. And, these beginnings of queer theory sought to create an alternative theoretical framework for feminism and gay and lesbian studies by focusing on the fluidity of identities and the political and social implications of reclaimed queerness.

At this point, I offer a brief explanation of the various conceptions of the word ‘queer’ itself and the ways in which I use the term throughout my research project. Originally used as a derogatory slang term against homosexual persons, ‘queer’ has been reclaimed by some as an umbrella term to encompass persons whose sexual orientation

²⁰ Ibid, 10.

²¹ Ibid, 45.

²² Ibid, 47.

does not align with normative modes of heterosexuality. In this way, queer can be seen as synonymous with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, Two-Spirit, or many other conceptions of non-normative sexualities and genders. ‘Queer imagery,’ for instance, could mean the depiction of lesbian interactions on film. Oftentimes, ‘to queer’ or ‘queering’ means to include representations of non-heteronormative sexualities and persons in systems or projects that initially excluded these persons. As an example, Jonathan Katz aimed to ‘queer the canon’ at the show *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* addressed in the first article of this thesis. In this understanding, Katz sought to change the canon of art history to include queer artists and their artworks.

Contemporary approaches to queer theory have since moved away from normativity and the central focus on sexuality to open other, varied areas of critique. The scope of queer theory today is vast, including questions of intersectionality (how sexuality intertwines with other areas of identity); queer critical race studies; queer theory’s relationship to citizenship, globalisation, and diaspora; queer geographies and spaces; queer children; queer histories, economies; queer affect studies and desire; queer futurities or lack thereof; amongst many other topics. Of particular interest to my research is the critique of gay assimilationist politics, otherwise known as homonormativity.

The concept of gay assimilationist politics has been around since the late 1990s. For instance, in 2001 Cathy Cohen wrote, “Queer politics has not lived up to its radical potential, but collapsed back into a simple gay politics whose sole lens of oppression is sexuality, or rather white middle-class gay sexuality.”²³ This means, for Cohen, that there

²³ Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Dulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001) cited in Jin Haritaworn, “Queer Mixed Race? Interrogating Homonormativity through Thai Interraciality,” in *Geographies of*

is a particular group of privileged LGBT persons who try to assimilate into society by disregarding other areas of oppression for other queer people such as race, class, and/or ability. Examining this trend, Lisa Duggan is acknowledged as the first person to coin a now widely used term in her text “The New Homonormativity.” Written in 2003, Duggan explained, “[Homonormativity] is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a destabilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”²⁴ This means that homonormativity looks at the current mainstream LGBT climate in North America as seeking inclusion within neoliberal structures. What Duggan’s approach highlights then, is the imbrication of homonormative values and the larger economic structure (neoliberalism) within which contemporary queer politics are negotiated.

Adam Smith first conceptualized liberalism in *The Wealth of Nations* from 1776. Neoliberalism, which has been the dominant mode of thought in western financial institutions since the early 1980s, advances the fundamental principle that government interference in markets is the cause of poor economic performance. Furthermore, it posits that only free market-based economies guarantee economic prosperity.²⁵ As Susan George suggests,

Sexualities: Theory, Practice, and Politics, edited by Kath Browne, Jason Kim, and Gavin Brown (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007): 101.

²⁴ Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, edited by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, 175-194 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 179.

²⁵ Harland Prechel, ed. *Politics and Neoliberalism: Structure, Process, and Outcome* (Oxford, UK: Elsevier JAI, 2007), 3.

In 1945 or 1950, if you had seriously proposed any of the ideas and policies in today's standard neo-liberal toolkit, you would have been laughed off the stage or sent off to the insane asylum... The idea that the market should be allowed to make major social and political decisions; the idea that the State should voluntarily reduce its role in the economy, or that the corporations should be given total freedom, that trade unions should be curbed and citizens given much less rather than more social protection – such ideas were utterly foreign to the spirit of the time. Even if someone actually agreed with these ideas, he or she would have hesitated to take such a position in public and would have had a hard time finding an audience.²⁶

Not only has neoliberalism affected economies, but, as George notes, it has permeated social and political lives as well. As Harland Prechel explains, “neoliberals assume that markets are morally good in themselves, and thus should be applied to all aspects of life (e.g., social relationships, identity.)”²⁷ This means that, following neoliberal principles, individualism is seen as a key aspect of society. Furthermore, social politics, programs, and interventions are disregarded as profitless aspects of daily lives. Henry Giroux's *The Terror of Liberalism*, worth quoting at length, describes the neoliberal climate for those who do not fit into the mainstream:

Within the discourse of neoliberalism, democracy becomes synonymous with free markets while issues of equality, social justice, and freedom are stripped of any substantive meaning and used to disparage those who suffer systemic deprivation and chronic punishment... As part of this larger cultural project fashioned under the sovereignty of neoliberalism, human misery is largely defined as a function of personal choices, and human misfortune is viewed as the basis for criminalizing social problems... [For example,] mothers who test positive for drugs in hospitals run the risk of having their children taken away by police. Young, urban, poor black men who lack employment are targeted by the criminal justice system and, instead of being educated or trained for a job, often end up in jail.²⁸

²⁶ Susan George, “A Short History of Neo-Liberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change,” *Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalizing World* (March 24-26 1999) <http://www.tni.org/article/short-history-neoliberalism>, accessed June 26 2013.

²⁷ Prechel, 4.

²⁸ Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism* (Aurora, ON: Garamond Press, 2004), xviii.

Lisa Duggan subsequently analysed how this neoliberal culture has shaped mainstream LGBT politics. Mounting an argument that is similar to that of Giroux, Duggan acknowledged that ideas such as freedom, democracy, and equality have been re-scripted for queer communities:

This new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: ‘equality’ becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, ‘freedom’ becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the ‘right to privacy’ becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life.²⁹

In other words, concepts such as ‘equality’ for some no longer means a place in which all people are equal and treated fairly. In this contemporary neoliberal climate, ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ are associated with assimilation into profitable societal systems. Two systems that are often cited as the projects of mainstream LGBT platforms are the military and marriage. However, the military and marriage can both be understood as heteropatriarchal institutions that create Othering processes and reinforce normative, Othering values.³⁰

Duggan’s homonormativity has been taken up extensively by scholars and activists to explain the way in which these seemingly progressive gains in these two areas

²⁹ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, 1st edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 65-66.

³⁰ For more information on historical and contemporary arguments rejection of LGBT marriage, see Nithin Manayath, “Why Marriage Equality May Not Be That Equal,” *Tehelka.com* 19, 10 (May 11 2013); Lynn Huffer, “The New Normal is Not Good Enough,” *The Huffington Post* (September 18 2012); or Tamara K. Nopper, “Beyond the Access Narrative: Marriage Politics, Austerity, Surveillance,” *The Feminist Wire* (May 19, 2012). (For a comprehensive, though not exhaustive list, visit <http://www.againstequality.org/about/marriage/>.) And for more information against LGBT assimilation into the military, see Steven W. Thrasher, “Haaay to the Chief: The Military Industrial Complex Conquers the Homos,” *Gawker* April 30, 2013; Yasmin Nair, Ryan Conrad, and Karma R. Chavez, “Against Equality: Don’t Ask to Fight Their Wars,” *Fifth Estate* 47, 2 (2012): 10-11; or Cindy Sheehan, “Don’t Go, Don’t Kill!” *Al Jazeera* (December 23, 2010). Again, for a comprehensive list, visit <http://www.againstequality.org/about/military/>.

for some LGBT people are directly tied into neoliberal culture. Before moving into a discussion of how homonormativity has been taken up in nationalist discourse, it is imperative to discuss the term homonormativity itself. As Duggan explained in her footnote when first introducing this term, “I am riffing here on the term heteronormativity... I don’t mean the terms to be parallel; there is no structure for gay life, no matter how conservative or normalizing, that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling.”³¹ In other words, the call to explain, elucidate, and critique homonormativity does not claim that homonormativity’s grasp has become as all-encompassing as that of heteronormativity. Heterosexuality has been constructed, reinscribed, naturalized, and internalized as the normative mode of sexuality in Western societies for centuries. By all accounts today, heterosexuality is overwhelmingly prevalent as the normal and assumed sexuality through various avenues of the media, religion, familial structures, government programs, and many others. Instead, homonormativity simply seeks to explain the normalizing impulses of some mainstream LGBT politics.

Homonationalism

People all over the world (*everyone*)
 Join hands (*join*)•
 Start a love train, love train.
 •- The O’Jays, 1972

Jasbir Puar coined the term ‘homonationalism’ in her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* from 2007. Homonationalism, briefly, is the way in which gay mainstream politics and nationalist discourse are mutually imbricated

³¹ Duggan, “The New Homonormativity,” 191.

movements and structures. Building on Duggan's ideas of homonormativity, Puar maintained that, "for contemporary forms of US nationalism and patriotism, the production of gay, lesbian, and queer bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism, insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm but also because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist projects."³² In other words, homonationalism describes the ways that homonormative politics – such as gay marriage and gay military rights – and nationalist politics hold up one another, teasing out interconnections between related processes of neoliberalism and globalization, racism and imperialism, and homonormativity and queerphobia. Since then, other queer theorists have mobilized Puar's term to unpack the more nuanced understandings of settler homonationalism³³ and homonationalisms, for instance.³⁴

In her book, Puar proposed that homonationalism is a conceptual framework for understanding how the acceptance of LGBT persons has become a marker for evaluating national sovereignty.³⁵ Said another way, "Homonationalism is an analytic category deployed to understand and historicize how and why a nation's status as 'gay-friendly' has become desirable in the first place."³⁶ *Terrorist Assemblages* particularly looked at the status of the United States and its relationship to the war on/of terror. She argued that one of the effects of this imperialist project has been to integrate some (but not all or even

³² Jasbir Puar, "Mapping US Homonormativities," *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, 1 (2006): 68.

³³ Scott Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, 1-2 (2010): 105-131.

³⁴ Melissa Autumn White has nuanced Puar's concept to focus on homonationalisms (in the plural) in her text "Ambivalent Homonationalisms: Transnational Queer Intimacies and Territorialized Belongings," *Interventions* 15, 1 (2013): 37-45. She analyses immigration systems in Canada as they create uneven vulnerabilities through the use of border control and geopolitical economies. White significantly holds that there are various national structures at play to create homonationalisms.

³⁵ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 4.

³⁶ Jasbir Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 336.

most) LGBT persons to United States citizenship.³⁷ At the expense of this nationalist welcoming, Puar further stated that brown bodies in the United States and the Middle East are now scripted as the sexual Other: “I argue that the Orientalist invocation of the ‘terrorist’ is one discursive tactic that disaggregates US national gays and queers from racial and sexual ‘others,’ foregrounding a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated by both national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay, lesbian, and queer subjects themselves: homo-nationalism.”³⁸

Homonationalism, as Puar envisioned it, is a critical lens through which we can see these processes happening. “It is rather a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality.”³⁹

Therefore, homonationalism is the current process whereby some LGBT persons access gay acceptance and status through their consumerism and economic mobility. However, this acceptance is contingent on maintaining heteronormative, neoliberal structures. As Puar explained, “Homonationalism is fundamentally a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 38.

³⁸ Puar, “Mapping US Homonormativities,” 67.

³⁹ Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism,” 337.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The allure of homonationalism and its assimilationist politics is based on a ‘good feeling’ strategy⁴¹ that recodes ‘good’ kinship while punishing those that fall outside of the terms. In this regard, those good gay persons (white, cis-gendered, able-bodied, upper-class, ‘legal’ citizens) are allowed their normative queerness.⁴² Inevitably, racism, classism, ablism, sexism, and many other systems of oppression are embedded in LGBT assimilationist politics.⁴³ While some gay men and lesbian women become ‘acceptably visible,’⁴⁴ others become further marginalised.⁴⁵ Put another way, LGBT mainstream movements in the North America often long for assimilation and nationalist welcoming, and appeal to heterosexual models that focus on the normalcy of its members. Therefore, the homonormative movement is based on the violent exclusion of a multitude of identities that do not perform a ‘normal’ queerness. Some of the ways this violent exclusion manifests itself is through the Prison-Industrial-Complex, oftentimes scripting queer-of-colour, trans, and other non-normative bodies as criminal and dispensable.⁴⁶ To include examples of these purported ‘gains’ for some LGBT persons, Puar cited:

⁴¹ Anna Agathangelou et al, “Intimate Investments: Homonormativity, Global Lockdown, and the Seductions of Empire.” *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 120-143 analyses the seductive appeal of mainstream gay movements, that succeed at the cost of those who remain violently excluded. “What bodies, desires, and longings must be criminalized and annihilated to produce the good queer subjects, politics, and desires that are being solidified with the emergence of homonormativity?” (Agathangelou et al, 124).

⁴² There are many texts that cite homonormativity’s racism and exclusionary foundations. For further reading, see Haritaworn, “Queer Mixed Race? Interrogating Homonormativity through Thai Interraciality,” in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practice, and Politics*, eds. Kath Browne, Jason Kim, and Gavin Brown, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007): 101-112; Heidi J Nast, “Queer Patriarchies, Queer Racisms, International,” *Antipode* 34 (2002): 877-909; and significantly, Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages*.

⁴³ Agathangelou et al, “Intimate Investments” hold that gay energies are focused on appeasing the mainstream rather than working in solidarity. Therefore, these systems need to be actively and openly critiqued in order to combat homonormativity’s seductive tendency.

⁴⁴ Diane Richardson, “Desiring Sameness? The Rise of Neoliberal Politics of Normalization.” *Antipode* 37 (2005): 524.

⁴⁵ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, cited in Gavin Brown, “Thinking Beyond Homonormativity: Performative Explorations of Diverse Gay Economies,” *Environment and Planning* 41 (2009): 1499.

⁴⁶ For more information on the Prison-Industrial-Complex (PIC) as it relates to race and sexuality in Canada, a very comprehensive source is Kiran Mirchandani and Wendy Chan, eds, *Crimes of Colour*:

Through the disaggregating registers of race, kinship, and consumption, queerness is also under duress to naturalize itself in relation to citizenship, patriotism, and nationalism. Thus the ‘gains’ achieved for LGBTIQ subjects— media, kinship (gay marriage, adoption), legality (sodomy), consumption (gay and lesbian tourism), must be read within the context of war on terror, the USA PATRIOT Act, the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, and unimpeded US imperialist expansion, as conservative victories at best, if at all.⁴⁷

Therefore, conceptualized as a way to understand current queer times, homonationalism is the way that some persons have been able to gain conditional acceptance in mainstream culture as long as their ‘gay rights’ successes are complicit with neoliberal ideals of free markets and individualism.

Homonationalism has since been taken up widely to explain LGBT trends not only in North America but Europe, the Middle East, and Africa as well. Significantly, this past April 2013, the Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the City University of New York hosted the first *Homonationalism and Pinkwashing Conference*. The conference saw 189 conference presenters from across the globe. The conference also had over 400 attendee spots, which sold out six months before the conference. Panels included the topics of Queer Iran, LGBT Rescue Narratives, Discourses of Latin America, The Corporate University, Zionism, Transgender and the Transnational, Porn and Prostitution, The African Diaspora, The Canadian Colonial Settler State, Couples, Lesbians and Feminisms, and Citizens, just to name a few. Evidently, the discussion of homonationalism has broadened to touch on various communities, religions, historic periods, and mediums. However, it is worth noting that I was the only presenter at the

Racialization and the Criminal Justice System in Canada (Broadview Press, 2001). There are numerous other sources on the PIC in the United States.

⁴⁷ Puar, “Mapping US Homonormativities,” 86.

conference who looked at art, making this project something of a test case for seeing how useful the concept of homonationalism will prove in analyzing case studies drawn from the art world.

Introducing the Articles

Queer theoretical scholars today analyse how queer theory has permeated other critical fields – such as visual studies – as well as the politics of everyday life. It is in this discussion that I situate my thesis. My thesis investigates how homonationalism operates through three distinct art practices. These three case studies take the form of different art media, in different countries, and in different years. However, they are brought together under the rubric of homonationalism as they each engage different aspects of this contemporary trend. The first article, *Queering the Canon: Museum Politics and Hide/Seek at the Smithsonian*, examines an example of homonationalist processes in the United States in the case of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition at the Smithsonian. The second article, entitled *Colonial Queeries: Centering a Two-Spirit Critique of Homonationalism*, analyses Kent Monkman's paintings and focuses on Miss Chief Eagle Testickle as a Two-Spirit critique. The third article, *(Pink)Washing the Conflict in Zero Degrees of Separation*, considers Elle Flanders's intentional critique of Israeli homonationalism and pinkwashing in her film *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

Queering the Canon: Museum Politics and Hide/Seek at the Smithsonian analyses the politics and curatorial problems that beset *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. Shown from October 2010 to February 2011 at the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, *Hide/Seek* revealed the connections between (homo)sexual identity and the development of American modern

art. Advertised as the first major exhibition about gay artwork in America, I situate *Hide/Seek* as a case study that parallels, yet complicates, a discussion of homonationalism in the United States. Drawing from conversations with curator Jonathan D. Katz, I argue that the exhibition had to be distinctly shaped and marketed as a sanitized, normalized LGBT show in order to be shown at the Smithsonian. Moreover, to further these objectives, the inclusion of canonical American artists proved essential. Of the mainstream LGBT artists that were included in *Hide/Seek*, most were male (seventy-four percent) and overwhelmingly white (ninety percent). I question how this exhibition, with a wide-reaching audience, contributed to the homonationalist construction of the good, gay citizen in the United States. Lastly, because the unveiling of sexualities in *Hide/Seek* was constantly related to both nationalism and the progression of American art, I suggest it is a fruitful example of a homonationalist project operating in the art world.

Colonial Queeries: Centering a Two-Spirit Critique of Homonationalism, the second article of this thesis, looks at three paintings from 2010-2012 by Kent Monkman. Monkman is a Canadian contemporary artist of Irish, British, and Cree ancestry who interrogates the ways in which First Nations peoples have been presented in nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical art works. For this article, I begin by outlining settler colonial theory to read Monkman's queer imagery as a critique of the way contemporary binary sexuality has been dependent on settler colonial imposition. I argue that Monkman's inclusion of a Two-Spirit character as central to his paintings works to destabilize settler homonationalism. Through his inclusion of Miss Chief Eagle Testicle — Monkman's flamboyant, high-heeled alter ego — Monkman deconstructs stereotypes and mythologies found within the dominant art culture that contribute to settler colonial legacies. By foregrounding queer First Nations subjects in his paintings, Monkman's

work considers how histories of Canadianness have been created, mythologized, and publicly circulated through the use of memorializing devices. Pointedly, Monkman's queer critique of Canadian colonialism calls on non-First Nations museumgoers to recognize how nationhood and sexuality are interwoven and privileged for them as settlers.

Lastly, *(Pink)Washing the Conflict in Zero Degrees of Separation*, explores the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in Jewish Canadian artist Elle Flanders's 2005 documentary film, *Zero Degrees of Separation*. In this film, we follow the lives of two queer couples – Ezra and Selim, and Edit and Samira – as they maneuver their daily lives of this conflict on both personal and political levels. Alongside this narrative, Flanders's families' 1950s home video footage of the establishment of Israel punctuates the film. Although *Zero Degrees* clearly relates present-day atrocities against Palestinian people to the historic founding of Israel, it does not seek to blame individuals. Instead, the film draws attention to overarching systems that led to both the initial necessity for Israel and the subsequent need for de-Occupation. It is not a simple story. Moreover, *Zero Degrees* can help us to better understand homonationalism. The film was made before homonational theory was termed, yet it distinctly analyses the projects and facets of homonationalism and pinkwashing. In this way, my study of *Zero Degrees* draws attention to complications of homonationalism by recognizing that oftentimes theory does not fully explain the intricacies of everyday lives. For instance, Selim and Samira are not persecuted for being queer as much as they are overwhelmingly persecuted for being Arabs. Therefore, *Zero Degrees* additionally creates new spaces for contemporary queer film that not only focus on queer storylines but also seek to understand sexuality in relation to nationhood, place, and history.

Therefore, in the three articles of this thesis, I analyse three different art works, in three different mediums, from three different countries, with three different areas of focus. However, art practices involved range within seven years of each other. They each too, I will argue, contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of our contemporary queer world and the impact of homonationalisms.

Figures



Fig 0.01 Husbands Michael Knaapen and John Becker embrace outside the Supreme Court in Washington, Wednesday, June 26, 2013. Photo by Charles Dharapak, courtesy of The Huffington Post. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/26/gay-marriage-news_n_3505487.html#slide=2621131].

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1.

Queering the Canon: Museum Politics and *Hide/Seek* at the Smithsonian

Heteronormativity can be overcome only by actively
imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world.
- Michael Warner⁴⁸

From October 2010 to February 2011, the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC presented the first major exhibition of (homo)sexual artwork in America.⁴⁹ Entitled *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, the exhibition's aim was to reveal the connections between sexual identity and the development of American modernism. The title of the exhibition, *Hide/Seek*, particularly referenced the way in which, historically, LGBT artists have had to hide queer imagery in their artworks that were only discernible if you knew how and where to find them.

I maintain that *Hide/Seek* is a fruitful place in which we can explore ideas of homonationalism in the United States. The term 'homonationalism,' which will be discussed extensively in this thesis, can be understood as the way that mainstream gay politics (also known as 'homonormativity') and nationalist politics mutually uphold one another through various methods and processes. To elucidate how *Hide/Seek* functions as a case study example of homonationalistic frameworks, I explore the museological tactics

⁴⁸ Michael Warner, ed. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xvi.

⁴⁹ In this instance, I use the term 'homosexual' rather than other community definitions such as 'LGBT' or 'queer.' Homosexual was used most frequently in reference to *Hide/Seek* mostly because, according to curator Jonathan D. Katz, "I'm also a scrupulous historian, I was careful not to call it gay or lesbian because that is instating the last roughly fifty years as constitutive of sexuality in the twentieth century and that's just incorrect. So I wanted to use a term that enabled the recognition of different historical epochs of sexuality" (interview with author). Furthermore, the majority of the artists included in *Hide/Seek* were male and cis-gendered, and 'LGBT' holds a more inclusive connotation (encompassing lesbian, gay, trans, and bisexual), which I propose the *Hide/Seek* exhibition could not uphold. I also refrain from using 'queer' here as the museum vehemently avoided this term, as will be addressed later in this chapter.

and politics leading to the curation of this show. Through this discussion, it will become clear that *Hide/Seek* had to be shaped and distinctly marketed as an exhibition of artists already assimilated into the canon of American art in order for it to be shown with these respectable artists and at a major institution such as the Smithsonian. Furthermore, this new unveiling of sexuality in art history was constantly connected to American nationalism and American progression. I close with an analysis of the strategic inclusion of Robert Mapplethorpe's work to argue that this exhibition, which reflects trends in society and in the art world, was homonationalistic.

Co-curator Jonathan D. Katz has said that *Hide/Seek* was an attempt to "queer the canon"⁵⁰ as a step towards the legitimization of queer persons in art history. This sentiment is reminiscent of homonational projects today that seek inclusion within conservative institutions in an attempt to open doors for further progressive rights and liberties. However, as this article will show, the attempt to use the canon for alternative gains was ultimately unsuccessful for *Hide/Seek* and its curators. Instead, I argue that their project was overwhelmed by controversy and compromise, offering little of concrete significance to queer artists and communities.

Difference and Desire in American Portraiture: A Brief Overview

The 105 artworks included in *Hide/Seek* were divided into the following sections: (1) Before Difference, 1870-1918; (2) New Geographies/New Identities; (3) Abstraction; (4) Postwar America: Accommodation and Resistance; (5) Stonewall and More Modern Identities; and (6) Postmodernism. Since there were a substantial number of artworks in

⁵⁰ Jonathan D. Katz, interview by author (July 6 2013).

Hide/Seek, it would be difficult to describe all of them. Instead, I will provide a brief “walk through” the exhibition and highlight the type of artworks that were on display. The museum-goer entered *Hide/Seek* from either ‘Before Difference, 1870-1918’ or ‘Postmodernism.’ We will start with ‘Before Difference’ so as to move relatively chronologically. As one enters the National Portrait Gallery space, they first come across Thomas Eakin’s *Salutat* (1898) in the centre of the room against a dark turquoise plinth (**fig. 1.01**). *Salutat* features a boxer waving to the crowd as he walks away from a match. The viewer’s eye is directly drawn, however, to his backside that seemingly glows. The remaining walls of the exhibition space are painted a muted taupe, interspersed with flat columns and archways.

As one turns to the left from *Salutat*, the wall text explains the show. To its right is *Nude Male Standing* by John Singer Sargent. Created around 1917-1920, *Nude Male Standing* is a charcoal drawing of an African-American man named Thomas McKeller. Though McKeller was merely a hotel employee, Sargent was obsessed with him and, in this drawing, poses McKeller’s muscular body in a manner reminiscent of Ancient Greek statues.⁵¹ In this same room, we come across a lithograph print of a male bathhouse in New York City by George Bellows. Entitled *The Shower Bath* (1917), Bellows’ print shows a scene of many men enjoying one another. At the centre of the image, a central burly character barely covers his erection with a towel as he chats with another man. Directly beside this image, another George Bellows artwork highlights similar

⁵¹ *Hide/Seek: Different and Desire in American Portraiture*, edited by Johnathan D. Katz and David C. Ward (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010. Catalogue of an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., October 2010 through February 2011), 72.

homosocial behaviour in industrial urban life.⁵² *River Front No. 1*, created in 1915, depicts nude young men swimming in the river and socializing (**fig. 1.02**).

On the other side of the entrance room, Marsden Hartley's *Painting No. 47, Berlin* (1914-1915) is a mourning portrait for Hartley's German lover, Karl von Freyburg, who was killed early in the First World War. Intermixed with these artworks in the first gallery space, there are also pieces from 'New Geographies/New Identities.' For example, Carl van Vechten's portrait of Langston Hughes is shown on the opposite wall. Created in 1932, this photograph displays the famous African-American poet and author, standing in a suit in front of a bookcase and an African mask. Another van Vechten photograph hangs on these walls (**fig. 1.03**). Created in 1940, the image shows choreographer Antony Tudor and dancer Hugh Laing in dressy suits, both looking happily at something to their upper left. They are holding hands, but this gesture is subtly hidden by Laing's arm that falls across his knee.

On two very narrow walls, directly behind the opening plinth, are two artworks by Romaine Brooks, including her self-portrait from 1923. In this stark painting, Brooks, sporting bright red lipstick is wearing a suit while standing on a balcony. The wall text suggests that, because Brooks was a wealthy independent woman, she was granted a rare freedom of expression for the time and her artwork offers a glimpse into an elite group of lesbians living in Paris between the World Wars.⁵³ A bright, stoic painting in Grant Wood's traditional style is situated across from the Brooks paintings (**fig. 1.04**). Entitled *Arnold Comes of Age* (1930), a young man stands in the centre of the painting in a neat, collared shirt. Behind him, a very small homoerotic scene occurs by the water's edge.

⁵² *Hide/Seek*, 80.

⁵³ *Hide/Seek*, 94.

As one walks through the archways, they come to the next small section entitled ‘Abstraction’ that includes works such as Lee Miller’s profile photograph of the surrealist artist, Joseph Cornell (**fig. 1.05**). Created in 1933, Cornell’s cheek has turned into a butterfly, his neck extends into a sailboat, and the sails are flanked by long, blonde hair. In this section one additionally sees Marsden Hartley himself, as photographed by George Platt Lynes in 1942. Still exhausted and full of despair after the death of his lover, Karl von Freyburg, Hartley sits slumped in a chair at the foreground of the frame. In the background, another blurred man stands in uniform. This artwork is a memorial to the lovers that Hartley and Lynes had both recently lost in the Second World War.⁵⁴

In the centre of the gallery, one enters ‘Beginning of the Postwar America: Accommodation and Resistance’ and approaches two Jasper Johns and a Robert Rauschenberg seemingly in dialogue over three separate walls. Included amongst these three are Johns’ *In Memory of my Feelings – Frank O’Hara* (1961) created in the year that Johns and Rauschenberg ended their relationship. It is an inverted, dark image of Johns’ famous *Flag* piece, created when he and Rauschenberg were together. Behind Johns’ *Ventriloquist* (1983), hangs David Hockney’s painting from 1961 (**fig. 1.06**). Entitled *We Two Boys Together Clinging* – the title of a Walt Whitman poem⁵⁵ – Hockney uses bright blues, reds, and whites to show blatant male erotic desire as the two men hold each other. Andy Warhol’s *Truman Capote’s Shoe* is also part of ‘Beginning of the Postwar America.’ From 1955, it is a gold leaf and ink drawing of an elaborate, flowery shoe produced during Warhol’s early infatuation with imaginary shoes created for real-life celebrities.

⁵⁴ *Hide/Seek*, 138.

⁵⁵ *Hide/Seek*, 170.

Moving into an adjoining room, a large full-length front-facing nude painting takes centre stage (**fig. 1.07**). Larry River's *O'Hara Nude with Boots* depicts his friend, collaborator, and sometimes lover, Frank O'Hara, with his foot on a cinder block, in brown boots, his arms raised above his head, in a barely intelligible domestic setting. Two historical sections take up the remaining gallery spaces, though the artworks are intermixed, entitled 'Stonewall and More Modern Identities' and 'Postmodernism.' Some of the artworks included are *Auto Polaroids* by Lucas Samaras (1970-1971) wherein the artist interviewed himself in various personas, incorporating wigs, makeup, and props to become fully immersed in the wide variety of characters. In addition, a small work, entitled *Yantra #1, Yantras of Womanlove* by Tee Corinne from 1982 displays four identical scenes, shown as if looking through a kaleidoscope. If the viewer takes time to pause and decipher the image, it becomes clear that the women are engaging in mutual cunnilingus. As the catalogue notes, "By heavily manipulating the images, Corinne minimizes the possibility that they will be usurped by a voyeuristic 'male gaze.'"⁵⁶

Amidst four Robert Mapplethorpe images lies Keith Haring's unfinished painting from 1989 (**fig. 1.08**). Keith Haring passed away from AIDS at the age of thirty-one and left behind this unfinished purple, lavender, and black acrylic painting in his infamous style. The onset of AIDS – including its personal effects and broader societal impact – becomes a central focus of the artworks in these sections. For instance, David Wojnarowicz's *Untitled (face in dirt)* from 1990 was created two years before he would die of AIDS-related complications. This close-up photograph shows Wojnarowicz as he dissolves peacefully into the landscape while being threateningly suffocated by it as

⁵⁶ *Hide/Seek*, 218.

well.⁵⁷ The focus on the impact of AIDS continues through the ‘Postmodernism’ section. One example is Jerome Caja’s work from 1991 entitled *Charles Devouring Himself*. The artist’s friend, Charles, had recently committed suicide when AIDS became unbearable. In this artwork, Caja has mixed Charles’s ashes with nail polish and painted a platter (**fig. 1.09**). According to the catalogue description, “this searing condemnation of America’s willingness to devour its sons during the AIDS crisis is immediately undercut by Jerome’s campy frivolity and cartoonish vulgarity.”⁵⁸ However, artworks in ‘Postmodernism’ also addressed other issues of identity, queerness, taboo subjects, and gender and sexual blurring.

One of Catherine Opie’s earliest series was included in *Hide/Seek*. From 1991, *Being and Having (Papa Bear, Chief, Jake, and Chicken)* is four photographs of her lesbian friends who occasionally dress in drag, as they play with gender binaries. A central passage between gallery spaces also included *Brotherhood, Crossroads, Etcetera (center panel)* from 1994 by Lyle Ashton Harris (**fig. 1.10**). It is an artwork in which two brothers are kissing, one holding a gun to the other’s chest, as the artist criticizes many dualisms in society (male/female, black/white, brotherly love/homosexual desire). Photography monopolised this section of the show. Images such as Annie Leibovitz’s *Ellen DeGeneres, Kauai, Hawaii* (1998) highlights the ambiguities (the brassiere and boxer shorts, the playful mime makeup and the tough cigarette) that the comedian typically adopts in presenting herself to the public.

In short, *Hide/Seek* featured a wide range of historical moments and artists, developments in the use of certain media, and the progression of certain themes for

⁵⁷ *Hide/Seek*, 226.

⁵⁸ *Hide/Seek*, 256.

LGBT artists working in the United States. In these respects, it was an impressive project. I will now analyse how this project came to fruition and how these artworks were chosen, focusing on questions of homonormativity and homonationalism.

Contemporary Homonationalism in the United States

Returning to issues raised in the introduction, we might recall that homonormativity, according to Lisa Duggan, is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”⁵⁹ In other words, homonormativity is a neoliberal project that does not challenge heterosexism but rather seeks cisgender, normative acceptance and inclusion.⁶⁰ In addition, LGBT lives and the “democratic diversity of proliferating forms of sexual dissidence”⁶¹ are judged against a privileged form of LGBT life that seeks to replicate heteronormativity and its patterns of consumption.

Queer activist Mattilda aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore expanded this definition in 2008, rejected the term ‘homonormative’ and instead referred to this trend as the ‘violence of assimilation’ by noting how some gay and lesbian persons have succeeded in

⁵⁹ Although there were earlier conceptions of the ideas of privilege, hierarchies, and assimilationist politics in the gay rights movement, the first time ‘homonormativity’ was used was in Lisa Duggan’s “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, eds. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 179.

⁶⁰ Cisgender refers to the persons for whom their biological sex matches their gender identity. This is oppositional to trans* persons, or those for whom their biological sex organs does not match their gender identity. Trans is an umbrella term that includes various non-gender conforming identities, such as transsexual, transgender, gender fluid, gender queer, third gender, or agender.

⁶¹ Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, edited by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 190.

becoming part of the mainstream power structure at the violent expense of other queer non-normative persons, such as those of colour, with disabilities, or trans persons.⁶²

Mattilda offered,

I would say “the violence of assimilation” to describe the ways in which gay people have become obsessed with accessing straight privilege at any cost; it’s almost like cultural erasure is the goal. Marriage and military service and adoption and ordination into the priesthood are suddenly “gay issues,” whereas things like housing, health care, police brutality, gentrification... those?⁶³

For some queer theorists, using the word ‘violence’ is particularly significant because the proliferation of homonormativity not only supports capitalism but also entails various forms of violence against the persons it excludes. Furthermore, Mattilda criticized the ways that heterosexual conformity and normativity (known as heteronormativity) has become the ultimate symbol for gay success.⁶⁴

Recently, queer scholars have expanded ideas of homonormativity to include homonationalism, or the way in which homonormative projects and nationalist projects are mutually imbricated systems. As Sarah Schulman elaborates,

What makes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies so susceptible to [homonationalism] — ... the tendency among some white gay people to privilege their racial and religious identity — is the emotional legacy of homophobia. Most gay people have experienced oppression in profound ways — in the family; in distorted representations in popular culture; in systematic legal inequality that has only just begun to relent. Increasing gay rights have caused some people of good will to

⁶² Mattilda is a queer activist whose quotations for this paper derive from her interview with Jason Ruiz in Ruiz, “The Violence of Assimilation: An Interview with Mattilda aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore,” *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 246. It is important to note here that, queers of colour or trans persons, for example, can be seen as normative or assimilationist. (In fact, some scholars have suggested the term ‘transnationalism’ to refer to the inclusion of trans persons in nationalist projects, but sadly this term already exists in alternate contexts.) However, the often-cited example of good, regular LGBT persons often excludes these identities.

⁶³ Ruiz, 237-238.

⁶⁴ Ruiz, 238.

mistakenly judge how advanced a country is by how it responds to homosexuality.⁶⁵

In other words, the recent phenomenon of LGBT assimilation into mainstream society has been directly related to nationalism. In today's global society, a country can be judged by other liberal democracies on the basis of how well they treat their gay people. As such, in order for some LGBT persons to be accepted into these discourses, they must show how normal and patriotic they are. For instance, in protests and rallies for gay marriage in the recent months, handmade signs often made direct correlations between nationalist pride and gay identities. In **Fig. 1.11** from March of this year, a woman stood with a sign that read: "Equality is Patriotic" while a LGBT Rainbow flag and an American flag dangled from each side of her bristol board. In another example (**fig. 1.12**), a protester held a sign that read, "I'm a daughter, tax payer, aunt, veteran, wife, federal employee, patriot" in the colours of the rainbow. Beside her, a woman waved the American flag and carried signs, one of which read, "Marriage is a constitutional right." In these examples – that I would argue are fairly representative of protest signs found during these months – legitimacy is based on patriotic, normative assimilation.

Hide/Seek came about during a point of strong homonationalist projects in the United States, with conversations opening up about gay marriage, hate crime legislation, and gay inclusion in the military. While it could be easily argued that the acceptance of some LGBT persons into institutions such as marriage and the military is ultimately beneficial for all LGBT persons as it shows progressive steps towards equality, it has to be noted that this acceptance is only for a few, conservative, normative persons. In this

⁶⁵ Sarah Schulman, "Israel and 'Pinkwashing'" *New York Times* (November 22 2011): A31. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html?_r=0, accessed June 28 2013.

way, social and sexual acceptability is dependent on how successfully a person can perform patriotism, and those that lie outside this nationalist agenda are not accepted into the assimilative fold. As such, the pronouncement of a country as ‘progressive’ now that it has taken steps towards marriage equality, for instance, often skews or masks other injustices that are still perpetuated, by the same systems, against LGBT persons.

It was in this homonationalist atmosphere that *Hide/Seek* was created. Within homonational queer times, conceptions of ‘equality’ and ‘acceptance’ are defined through “narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions”⁶⁶ such as legalised family units, citizenship, and the art institution. In this way, we can use *Hide/Seek*, and the politics that resulted in its curation, to better understand homonationalist trends today.

Museum Politics and Curatorial Conundrums

From 1995-2007, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force studied the representation of sexuality in New York City’s eight largest museums.⁶⁷ According to Weena Perry, author of the study, “some museums, such as the New York Historical Society, have never once mentioned same-sex sexuality in its catalogues, wall labels, or publicity materials.”⁶⁸ She further found that nationally, only one to three percent of exhibitions referenced queer sexualities. Not surprisingly then, *Hide/Seek* co-curator Jonathan D. Katz met with widespread hostility in his attempts to bring LGBT artwork to a major museum. In an

⁶⁶ Duggan, “The New Homonormativity,” 190.

⁶⁷ Johnathan D. Katz references this study in his article “At Last, A Major Exhibition Devoted to GLBT Art,” however it is unpublished. The unpublished art report (Weena Perry, “New York City Museums’ Representation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Artists and Art.” *National Gay & Lesbian Task Force*. DRAFT Three: August 2007) was released to *Out History* on April 21st, 2011 and its findings are available online: http://outhistory.org/wiki/Weena_Perry:_NYC_Museums%E2%80%99_Representation_of_LGBT_Artists_and_Art,_August_2007

⁶⁸ Katz, “At Last, A Major Exhibition Devoted to GLBT Art.”

interview, Katz stated that it took him fifteen years of actively trying to get an exhibition like this at a major American museum, further claiming that there was a “blacklist on queer representation in the US museum world.”⁶⁹

Katz had begun, he explained, to try to circulate a queer exhibition in 1990, after the Mapplethorpe controversy.

If you recall, in 1989 was the great Mapplethorpe brouhaha. I wanted to put a stake in that and I wanted to get the progressive institutions on-record as turning back the time on homophobia and government censorship which was very, very prevalent in those days. It was palpable. We had – from Jesse Helms – what those of us called ‘No Promo Homo’ which was a federal law that prevented any government funding for any show that normalized queerness or addressed AIDS. So this was a really vile time. And given the high feeling at the time, it was pretty clear that I thought a place like San Francisco was a place where you could do such an exhibition. I went to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and I was told, “no.” It was striking to me that these major museums and the major queer cities wouldn’t touch this exhibition.⁷⁰

His frustration grew from there. Over the years, Katz approached approximately ten different institutions to show a major queer art exhibition, and each of them rejected his project. However, in 2006, he met eventual co-curator David C. Ward and they began conversations to show *Hide/Seek*. Katz elaborates, “I had been trying for fifteen years to do various kinds of queer shows and every museum that I had approached shut me down before that conversation even really got started. I realized that if I was going to be able to get a major museum to do a queer show – and goodness knows it needed to be done – the only way to do it would be in essence to make that show fit their extant rubrics.”⁷¹ In other words, the National Portrait Gallery had recently publicized that they were moving away from their previously stodgy image to include “the expansion of civil rights for

⁶⁹ Brian Logan, “Hide/Seek: Too Shocking for America,” *The Guardian* (December 5, 2010): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/dec/05/hide-seek-gay-art-smithsonian>.

⁷⁰ Katz, interview by author.

⁷¹ Katz, interview by author.

populations that had previously been subject to discrimination.”⁷² Therefore, when Katz and Ward came to the directors with a queer show, they had difficulties finding a reason to say no.

However, even once the National Portrait Gallery had agreed to hold this queer show, it was still difficult to secure loans.

I had originally prepared a list of 436 works to show and all of them were critically important. The museum basically said, “Over our dead body, that’s not a show.” So they made me cut it down to initially 110 works and it ended up being 105. But what I quickly realized was that my wish list was not in accordance with reality. The museum world was a deeply conservative place and many, many museums would not lend. Some museums would not even have a conversation, would not return a phone call, would not return a letter. In some instances, such as the Amon Carter Museum with John Thomas Eakin’s painting *Swimming* – which was, for me, one of the requisite works for this exhibition – the Director said, quote, “My painting is not going in that show. Period.” In other instances, for example, I named the show for the Tchelitchew painting *Hide and Seek* in the collection of the MoMA and I pleaded with MoMA – given the fact that the show was entitled after their painting – to lend me that painting. They would not wiggle. They did not lend.⁷³

Oftentimes, museums or collectors did not want their artworks associated with homosexuality.⁷⁴ Ward and Katz therefore faced a four-year curatorial conundrum while selecting artists and artworks because many of these artists’ estates “objected to their inclusion”⁷⁵ and only thirty percent of museums would agree to lend. Thus, *Hide/Seek* had to shy away from a queer concentration, and instead claimed to focus on “straight artists representing gay figures, gay artists representing straight figures, gay artists representing gay figures, and even straight artists representing straight figures (when of interest to gay

⁷² Katz, interview by author.

⁷³ Katz, interview by author.

⁷⁴ Brian Logan, “Hide/Seek: Too Shocking for America,” *The Guardian*.

⁷⁵ Allen Ellenzweig, “Before you Visit the Exhibition...” *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 18, 2 (2011): 37.

people/culture)”)”⁷⁶ and leave more room for interpretation. By maintaining that this exhibition was not *only* queer, and that it was not *only* addressing sexuality (in its title for instance), the artists’ estates could claim that their works were not *necessarily* queer, a move that upheld their monetary value and reputation.

Therefore, Katz and Ward compromised on many of their initial goals:

I was a presenter of the canon that I was trying to queer. I thought then, and I think now, that it’s not the type of show that I would have curated had I been given essentially the freedom to do whatever I wanted to do. But I felt it necessary to queer the canon and I also felt that there was a larger prize in making the kind of show that would pass muster at a type of institution like the National Portrait Gallery. So I gave up a lot of sexual explicitness, I made sure that there were no genitals on display (except by heterosexual male painters), and I was doing what I could to operate within the expectations of the Portrait Gallery.⁷⁷

Additionally, the exhibition could not show any sexual intercourse (though Katz snuck sex in with Tee Corinne’s *Yantra #1, Yantras of Womanlove*) and had to shy away from ever actually using the word ‘queer.’ When I asked Katz about the title of *Hide/Seek*, and how it very ambiguously references sexuality, he responded:

The title was a year-long debate... The museum hated the word queer. Hated, hated, hated, hated, hated the word queer. I could explain to them until I was blue in the face that queer is the contemporary, academic terminology and they noted, not incorrectly, that it would be seen by older progressives as a slur, and by the right as affirmation of their perspectives. So, they wanted me to use other terminology. I wanted to initially call the show ‘Queer American Art’ but they were just not interested.⁷⁸

Therefore, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* was created. At least on a superficial level, judging from the title, the show was not necessarily about queer sexualities, and as such – as noted previously – museums would lend their artworks more readily. Moreover, and significantly for my analysis, the title

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Katz, interview by author.

⁷⁸ Katz, interview by author.

distinctly references American progression. To clarify this point, the entrance plaque of

Hide/Seek read:

The first major exhibition to examine the influence of gay and lesbian artists in creating modern American portraiture, *Hide/Seek* chronicles how, as outsiders, gay and lesbian artists occupied a position that turned to their advantage [so that] people and groups can claim their full inheritance in America's promise of equality, inclusion and social dignity.⁷⁹

This text is particularly important because it replicated many of the homonationalist tendencies mentioned above in a number of ways. Firstly, the entrance plaque distinctly referenced “gay and lesbian artists” rather than queer artists, as Katz established that the museum would not let him use the word queer. Secondly, the notion of claiming “their full inheritance in America’s promise of equality, inclusion and social dignity” portrayed the United States as a welcoming, gay-friendly place, while simultaneously ignoring its sometimes very violent reality for queer persons through, for example, the unjust prison system.⁸⁰ By evoking the concept of the ‘American dream,’⁸¹ *Hide/Seek* reflected homonationalist trends that deny many of the real experiences of queer persons living in the United States, for whom this ‘American dream’ is often simply impossible due to interpersonal and systemic barriers. In this example, ‘equality’ and the ‘American dream’ are construed as access to formal institutions such as art institutions.

Hide/Seek can also be read through a homonationalist perspective because of its the acceptance of some LGBT artworks as long as they did not disrupt the conservative institution of the art canon. Notably, it was considered necessary that all of the artists and

⁷⁹ This citation is from the *Hide/Seek* catalogue as quoted in Andrew Holleran, “An Astonishment at the Smithsonian,” *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 18, 2 (2011): 50, 36.

⁸⁰ This has been addressed in a footnote 46 from the Introduction.

⁸¹ The American Dream is an expression rooted in the idea that upward social and economic mobility can occur based on hard work for anyone in the United States.

most of the artworks be well known. In other words, because the artists were canonical⁸² – as was the intention of Katz – their LGBT identity was more acceptable. The curator's use of established artists, from Grant Wood to Georgia O'Keefe, provided *Hide/Seek* with an air of legitimacy and patriotic standing. This exercise was, as one reporter called it, 'Hall-of-Fame building'⁸³ which meant that, rather than being an effort to chip away at the art historical foundation of hierarchy and exclusion, the curators contributed to upholding the (perceived) legitimacy of the canon. Katz has said that he aimed to *use* the canon for the first major gay art exhibition in America to pave the way for future queer shows.

I wanted a show that would unsettle contemporary visions of what homosexuality looks like or means, and I wanted a range of canonical artists. I was clear on this point because I recognize that the first show, in order to get the kind of traction that it needed to get, these had to be works that had been seen in museums in other contexts, just not in this one... I had to queer the canon in order to get the guardians of that canon to sit up and pay attention.⁸⁴

This action parallels contemporary homonational times where legitimacy is conferred by patriotism. Furthermore, Katz's reasoning reflects homonationalist discourse that argues that opening the door for some LGBT persons into institutions such as marriage and citizenship ultimately benefits all LGBT persons, as it is a step in the right direction. However, when I asked Katz if he thought *Hide/Seek* had made a difference, he stated: "I think it has only to the extent that it has emboldened younger people. But the museum curators that are in office? Half of them are queer. Nothing's going to change."⁸⁵

⁸² I am using 'canonical' here as it is understood to be a heteronormative (and now perhaps homonormative) lineage of significant works that can be tied into nationalist rhetoric.

⁸³ Holland Cotter, "Sexuality in Modernism: The (Partial) History," *The New York Times* (December 10, 2010): http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/arts/design/11hide.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁸⁴ Katz, interview by author.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that museums are conservative institutions, and the *Hide/Seek* exhibition is not representative of all of the United States of America. As Katz suggested, “There is a highly delimiting way in which American museums work because they are private institutions. They are thus enthralled to boards of directors who are, by definition, rich and thus overwhelmingly politically conservative. They want to conserve what they have. So, by virtue of the fact that they are run by rich conservatives, museums act conservative.”⁸⁶ Therefore, my aim is not to say that this show is reflective of all of American society and values. Instead, *Hide/Seek* can be used to shed light on homonationalist tendencies.

A Case Study: The Strategic Inclusion of Robert Mapplethorpe

The decision to include some of Robert Mapplethorpe’s work could be seen as an example of the homonationalism tenet that it is acceptable to show alternative sexualities as long as it is normative, domestic, and patriotic. Robert Mapplethorpe was a New York photographer who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1989. He created stunning black and white photographs of queer people and lives, often playfully highlighting the lived experience of being a queer person and those parts of queer communities that do not aim to assimilate into normative culture.

In that same year that Mapplethorpe died, *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington was cancelled mainly because of the actions of Republican Senator Jesse Helms, who infamously carried around a paper with Mapplethorpe images from the exhibition and challenged reporters to see the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

‘obscenity’ of these images. I would contend that one of the reasons that Mapplethorpe’s work was seen as so ‘obscene,’ was because of his unabashed inclusion of queer imagery in his artworks. In an interview, *Hide/Seek* curator Jonathan D. Katz said that *The Perfect Moment* was the first time that a discussion of queerness and art practices took place at a major museum:

The first attempt at such a discussion took place in 1989 with the Mapplethorpe brouhaha, which caused same-sex sexuality to become blacklisted in the American museum world, a blacklist that remains in effect to this day. Brilliantly exploited by the Christian Right as a wedge issue, openly GLBT art and artists became pariahs... The result has been the virtual erasure of sexual difference from American museums.⁸⁷

Therefore, Katz believed it was imperative to include Mapplethorpe images in *Hide/Seek* due to their aesthetic and historical significance. On one wall in the exhibition (**fig. 1.13**), *Hide/Seek* featured Mapplethorpe’s self-portrait from 1975, where, as a young budding artist, Mapplethorpe spreads his arms out across the print (**fig. 1.14**). Next, Mapplethorpe’s *Brian Ridley and Lyle Heeter* (1979), features a photograph that is a playful inversion of the classic family photograph, challenging what it means to be a ‘normal’, ‘domestic’ couple by juxtaposing the sitters’ S&M leather with their antique collection (**fig. 1.15**). From 1980, Mapplethorpe’s photograph of *Lisa Lyon* features the former body builder who became a regular muse and model for the artist. Lastly, from 1988, the show features a self-portrait of Mapplethorpe a year before he died of AIDS (**fig. 1.16**). Mapplethorpe stands as a figure of death with his skull-capped cane, in a last frivolous nod to defy his critics.⁸⁸

In order to placate certain museum-goers and to not rock the canonical boat, Katz and Ward made a strategic selection of Mapplethorpe’s work that, as promised to the

⁸⁷ Katz, “At Last, a Major Exhibition Devoted to GLBT Art.”

⁸⁸ *Hide/Seek*, 220.

National Portrait Gallery, did not show male genitals (which is a relatively difficult feat with Mapplethorpe's work) and did not include his more potentially shocking photographs. For instance, even *Brian Ridley and Lyle Heeter*, which some right-wing conservatives found abhorrent,⁸⁹ was relatively playful and silly. The photograph situates two burly, leather-clad men in a classic living room, surrounded by antiques and oriental rugs. Mapplethorpe uses deadpan humour in this serious, traditional portrait (with traditional accoutrements) juxtaposed with the men in bondage gear.

Thus, the inclusion of specific Mapplethorpe works in *Hide/Seek* revealed that mainstream art institutions, too, sometimes must participate in homonormative and homonational projects. It would have been extremely difficult for Katz and Ward to have included images such as *Jim and Tom, Sausolito* from 1977-1978 (**fig. 1.17**), *Man in a Polyester Suit* (1980) (**fig. 1.18**), or Mapplethorpe's 1978 *Self-Portrait with Whip* (**fig. 1.19**). These images, by unabashedly showing queer bodies and their interactions, could have disrupted normative conceptions of LGBT persons. Furthermore, the artworks that were incorporated in *Hide/Seek* were acceptable because they were tied to concepts of nationalism. The wall panels, catalogues, and discourse surrounding the inclusion of Mapplethorpe spoke to American history because it firstly highlights the controversy surrounding *The Perfect Moment* and the resultant culture wars in the United States. Secondly, Mapplethorpe's inclusion of alternative sexualities and perspectives in his photography was hugely significant for political artwork of the 1980s and 1990s.

⁸⁹ Penny Starr, "Smithsonian Christmas-Season Exhibition Features Ant-Covered Jesus, Naked Brothers Kissing, Genitalia, and Ellen DeGeneres Grabbing Her Breasts." *CSN News* (November 29, 2010) <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/smithsonian-christmas-season-exhibition-features-ant-covered-jesus-naked-brothers-kissing>, accessed April 10 2012.

Conclusions

Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread.

- Judith Butler⁹⁰

As Eve Tushnet notes, “*Hide/Seek* aim[ed] to reshape our understanding of the American artistic canon, placing gay aesthetics at its center rather than its margins.”⁹¹ However, the aesthetics that were included were normative and nationalistic because the curators did what they could with *Hide/Seek* during these limiting, homonational times. After having his proposals for a queer show rejected for over fifteen years, Katz worked with his surroundings to create an exhibition that would hopefully open space for further queer art shows. He added,

I wanted this conversation to cast in relief the refusal or silencing on the part of all the other museums in the United States on these issues. I was also cognizant of the fact that I couldn’t do everything in this first exhibition and so I kept saying to myself, when I was delimiting the kind of selections that I would make if I were given free reign, that this would engender both criticism from the left and from the right and that criticism is a good thing because it will create the space for other exhibitions. What I didn’t expect was the resilience of the forces of the opposition.⁹²

Today, Katz explained, he still faces academic objections and sometimes even violent hostility for his attempt to include queer conversations in art history. In this way, even the response that Katz receives now is indicative of the times in which we live and the rejection of the queer project. It is worth stressing that this queer project does not merely constitute a minority population of same-sex desire, but calls into question the very idea

⁹⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 29.

⁹¹ Eve Tushnet, “Flawed Reflection: *Hide/Seek* at the National Portrait Gallery,” *Commonwealth* 138, 2 (2011): 22.

⁹² Katz, interview by author.

of norms and normality, further drawing attention to the violence involved in normalization.⁹³

In this way, I have argued the curatorial problems, projects, and hurdles that *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* encountered – reflective also of trends in society and in the art world – were homonationalistic. The exhibition itself necessarily had to focus on homonormative discussions of citizenship. For example, *Hide/Seek* included artists, such as Robert Mapplethorpe, who sought new modes of presenting and expressing queerness that distanced them from the growing gay mainstream movement. However, today their works have become progressively more assimilated into mythologized nationalistic discourse and museum institutions. *Hide/Seek*, which parallels trends in society, did not challenge these normalizing impulses but upheld and sought inclusion within them. Curators face many obstacles when seeking radical change, especially in the attempts to operate within mainstream institutions. As a step in an optimistic direction, Katz and Ward attempted to work within the canon rather than to abandon it.⁹⁴

Consequently, as the first major exhibition of LGBT art, *Hide/Seek* has noteworthy implications. For instance, the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art opened in New York City in 2011. The first dedicated LGBT art museum in the world, the Leslie Lohman holds six to eight major exhibitions a year, and recently worked with co-curator Jonathan D. Katz for a show on Paul Thek. Otherwise, however,

⁹³ J.K. Gibson-Graham, “Queer(y)ing Capitalism in and out of the Classroom,” *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 23, 1 (1999): 83) cited in Brown, 1947.

⁹⁴ Of course, the call to abandon the canon is fraught with innumerable intertwined socio-political and administrative impediments. This is simply not possible for many artists and curators who seek to work within this neoliberal, capitalist economy and world. As such, the call to completely abandon the canon often comes from a place of privilege, ignoring these various other factors.

since *Hide/Seek* there have been very few, if any, large queer art projects in the United States. Although local art groups and small institutions continue to curate queer art shows, events, and publications, their work mostly continues unabated by the influence of *Hide/Seek*, either negatively or positively. Nonetheless, Katz and Ward should be unquestionably commended for starting a conversation and laying out new conditions for queer art history. Hopefully, *Hide/Seek* will eventually open new doors and create new possibilities for further queer art shows in the United States.

Figures



Fig. 1.01 Hide/Seek Entrance (film still, 00:01). Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].



Fig. 1.02 John Singer Sargent (far left) and two George Bellows (centre) (film still, 00:14). Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].



Fig. 1.03 Carl van Vechten, *Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor*, 1940, gelatin silver print, 24 cm x 18 cm. Courtesy of Yale University, New Haven, CT. [<http://elvirabarney.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/hughlaingantonytudor1231.jpg>].



Fig. 1.04 Romaine Brooks self-portrait and Arnold Comes of Age (film still, 00:26). *Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD*, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].



Fig. 1.05 Lee Miller, *Joseph Cornell*, 1933, gelatin silver print, 31 cm x 24 cm. Courtesy of Lee Miller Archives.
[\[http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m81bbrBbdM1rw3fqbo1_1280.jpg\]](http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m81bbrBbdM1rw3fqbo1_1280.jpg).



Fig. 1.06 *We Two Boys Together Clinging* (film still, 01:53). Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].



Fig. 1.07 *O'Hara Nude with Boots* (film still, 02:02). Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].

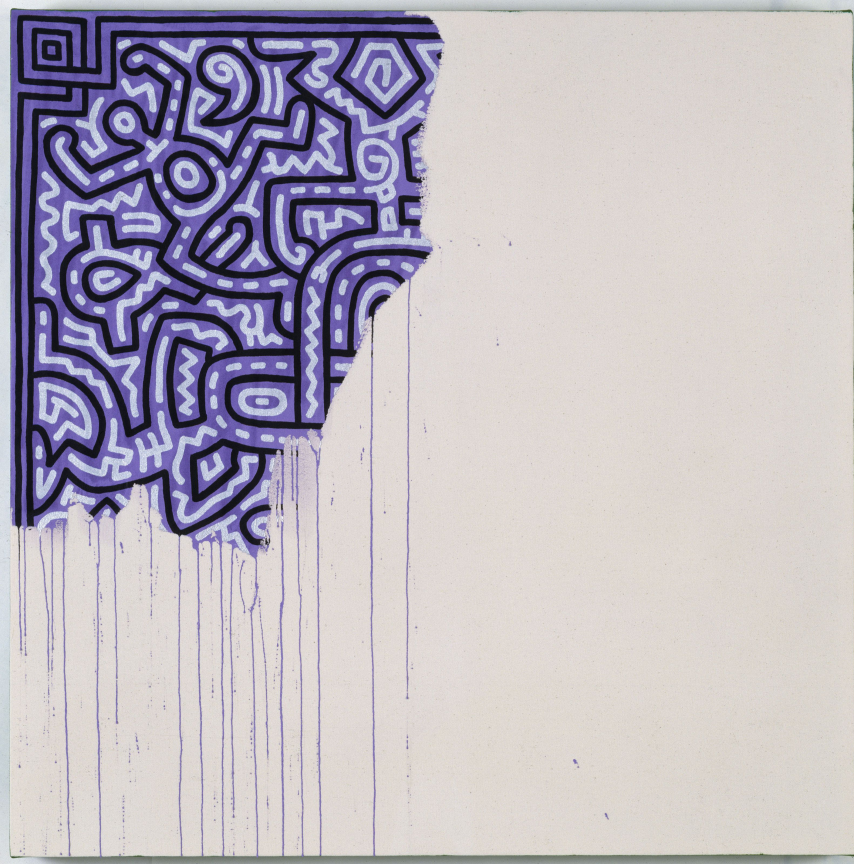


Fig. 1.08 Keith Haring, *Unfinished Painting*, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm x 100 cm. Courtesy of Katia Perlstein. [http://arthistory.about.com/od/from_exhibitions/ig/Hide-Seek/Keith-Haring-Unfinished-Painting-1989.htm].



Fig. 1.09 Jerome Caja, *Charles Devouring Himself*, 1991, ash and nail polish on platter, 21.6 cm in diameter. Courtesy of Scott England [http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Media/Caja_Imgs/charlesdevouring.JPEG].



Fig. 1.10 Hallway featuring *Brothers, Kissing, Etcetera* (film still, 03:28). Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].



Fig. 1.11 Equality is Patriotic, March 26, 2013, Courtesy of BuzzFeed.com.



Fig. 1.12 Patriot. March 26, 2013, Courtesy of BuzzFeed.com.



Fig. 1.13 Haring, Mapplethorpe, Gonzalez-Torres (film still, 03:08). Hide/Seek Walkthrough HD, produced by VideoArt Productions (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2010). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb9k6lVEoJo>].



Fig. 1.14 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self-Portrait*, 1975, gelatin silver print, 40.6 cm x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.
[http://ic.pics.livejournal.com/sensen/1429329/96338/96338_original.jpg]



Fig. 1.15 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Brian Ridley and Lyle Heeter*, 1979, gelatin silver print, 40.6 cm x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

[[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_Y-](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_Y-EUnNNnv5I/TMd1CtOJysI/AAAAAAAAABds/PS6njru2rgc/s320/mapplethorpe.jpg)

[EUnNNnv5I/TMd1CtOJysI/AAAAAAAAABds/PS6njru2rgc/s320/mapplethorpe.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_Y-EUnNNnv5I/TMd1CtOJysI/AAAAAAAAABds/PS6njru2rgc/s320/mapplethorpe.jpg)]

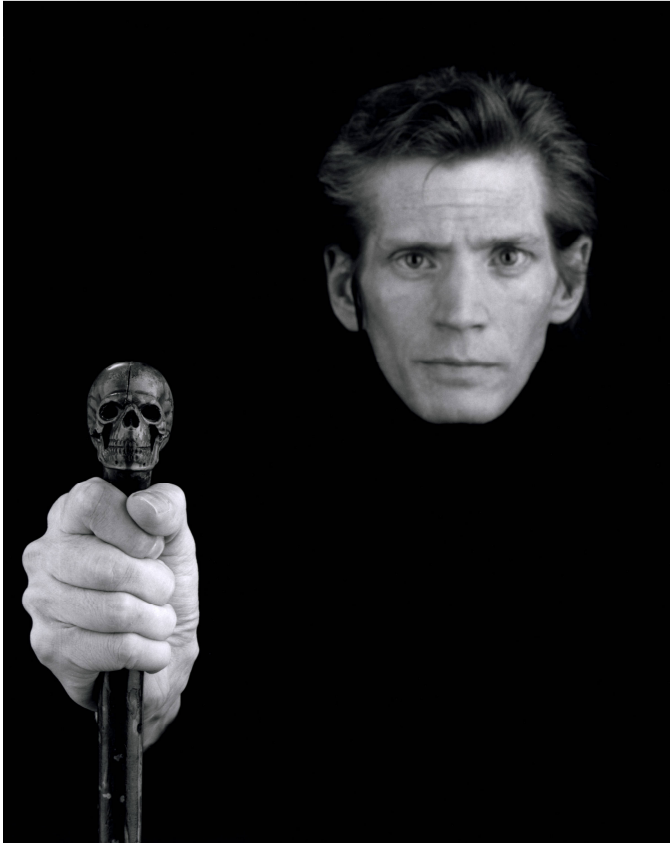


Fig. 1.16 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self-Portrait*, 1988, gelatin silver print, 61 cm x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

[<http://0.tqn.com/d/arthistory/1/0/G/3/1/Robert-Mapplethorpe-Self-Portrait-1988.jpg>]



Fig. 1.17 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Man in a Polyester Suit*, 1980, gelatin silver print, 50 cm x 40 cm. Courtesy of a New York City private collection
[<http://www.artnet.com/artwork/426256635/425934936/robert-mapplethorpe-man-in-a-polyester-suit.html>].



Fig. 1.18 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Jim and Tom, Sausalito*, 1977-1978, gelatin silver print, 3.42 cm x 3.42 cm. Courtesy of the Tate Britain.
[<http://www.naderlibrary.com/maplethorpe.32A.htm>]



Fig. 1.19 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self Portrait with Whip*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 35.5 cm x 35.5 cm. Courtesy of Holly Solomon.
[http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=4893268]

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2.

Colonial Queeries: Centering a Two-Spirit Critique of Homonationalism

Queering is at its heart a process of wonder.
- Jeffrey J. Cohen⁹⁵

A fictional wandering artist from the Great Plains of North America named Miss Chief Eagle Testickle travels far and wide to study the majestic European Male in his natural surroundings. In paintings *Sunday in the Park* (2010), *Empathy for the Less Fortunate* (2011) and *Teaching the Lost* (2012), Miss Chief – contemporary artist Kent Monkman’s flamboyant, high-heeled alter ego – encounters, inspects, and paints various characters drawn from modern canonical works of art. These three paintings employ Monkman’s technique of personifying identifiable art historical styles, setting them against a typically sublime colonial landscape, while complicating these histories with his interjection of Miss Chief. Found in many of Monkman’s paintings, Miss Chief often draws on the origins of her name and lures unsuspecting fictional bystanders into a *mischievous* day of revelry in her role of *egotistical* painter, both sympathising with and contributing to the ‘Othering’ process of her aesthetic documentation.

Monkman’s paintings simultaneously elucidate and deconstruct dominant mythologies found within museum spaces. Monkman quotes elements from Canadian historical paintings and European modern paintings to seduce the museum audience into his story. Once immersed in Monkman’s meticulously produced campy paintings, the museumgoer is confronted with a Two-Spirit critique of representations of First Nations people. With information found on wall-plaques and catalogue entries, the viewer learns

⁹⁵ Jeffrey J Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 38.

that Miss Chief is a Two-Spirit character. Two-Spirit comes from the North Algonquin word *niizh manitoag* (meaning Two-Spirits) encompassing “gay, lesbian, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, drag queens, and butches, as well as *winkte*, *mádleeh*, and other appropriate tribal terms.”⁹⁶ A relatively new term in widespread usage, a Two-Spirit critique pulls from both queer theory and Indigenous studies.

Working from a Two-Spirit critique, I maintain these paintings mutually imbricate queer studies and postcolonial studies to expose how *settler* homonationalism operates in two ways: first, Monkman’s reversal of the exoticism and Othering of museological and aesthetic techniques highlights the absurdity of these historical documentations of First Nations peoples,⁹⁷ and second, by queering this reversal – through his addition of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, a Two-Spirit character – Monkman’s work complicates a contemporary homonationalist perspective. To say this another way, in speaking about homonationalism, this article will progress from a discussion of the ways that colonialism has been reinscribed and mythologized through art practices, to an analysis of how a Two-Spirit critique elucidates the way binary understandings of gender and sexuality are dependent on, and crucial to, colonialism. This colonialism manifests in the current processes and projects of homonationalism.

⁹⁶ (Richard LaFortune) Anguksuar, “A Postcolonial Colonial Perspective on Western (Mis)Conceptions of the Cosmos and the Restoration of Indigenous Taxonomies,” in *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*. Eds. Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997): 221.

⁹⁷ A note on terminology: I am using Indigenous (when looking at theory) and First Nations (when looking at people). Indigenous could be used interchangeably with ‘Native’ or ‘Aboriginal’ in many contexts; First Nations, however, only refers to Canadian Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, I will use ‘First Nations’ as an overarching term for the purposes of this paper as Monkman is Canadian citizen and I am writing in what is now known as Canada. Of course, these terms are all products of colonization and are used to distinguish Indigenous peoples from settler Europeans. Further, by using an overarching term such as ‘First Nations,’ I recognize the attempt to elucidate common histories fails to recognize diversities. I will use specific tribal names and terms when referencing particular First Nations societies.

Kent Monkman

Based in Toronto, Kent Monkman is a contemporary artist of Swampy Cree, English, and Irish descent. He is a well-known Canadian multimedia artist whose work is in the collections of many notable museums including the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada. Particularly, Monkman's ability to bring together contentious histories, sexy characters, and beautiful sceneries has led his work to become the focus of attention for art enthusiasts and scholars alike. Monkman's work also merges his own personal history with broader histories of First Nations interactions. As David Liss writes, "Inspired by Foucault's notion of sexuality as an exchange of power, [Monkman] sought to explore his ancestral language as a physical construct and the body as a site of contestation, inflected by conquest, struggle, and implicit questions of identity."⁹⁸ Monkman's investigation into the body as a site of contestation is achieved through his inclusion of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. As described by critic Ashley Johnson: "Monkman has created a unique alter ego in Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. This regal personage rides a horse and ravages the Wild West. Miss Chief is both male and female, outfitted with weapons and chieftain's bonnet but also pink feathers and pumps, augmented by accessories from Louis Vuitton and the Hudson's Bay Company."⁹⁹

Monkman includes Miss Chief in paintings, films, and performances in an attempt to analyse the constructed understandings of 'Canadianness' in regard to histories and identities. In response to a show at Concordia University, art critic M.J. Thompson maintained that Monkman "insists on the perspectival aspect of history, on the artifice of identity, and twists the felt 'fixed-ness' of intercultural power dynamics via a curious mix

⁹⁸ David Liss, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief's Return, Subverting the Canon through Sublime Landscapes and Saucy Performances," *Canadian Art* 22, 3 (2005): 79.

⁹⁹ Ashley Johnson, "Kent Monkman," *Canadian Art* 25, 1 (2008): 110.

of sincerity and camp.”¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, Thompson concluded, “This collection of images never let me turn away from the shady goings on and political betrayal that continue to shape our encounter with the First Nations.”¹⁰¹ Monkman’s paintings and their workings thus analyse the constructed histories of First Nations and settler interactions. In this capacity, Monkman specifically appropriates well-known historical landscapes and modern European artists and transposes them into queer storylines.

Teaching Empathy on Sunday: An Introduction

Monkman is an extremely prolific artist. Along with his performances and films, Monkman creates many large-scale, detailed paintings a year. For this article, I have chosen to analyse three of his paintings that use historical tropes and styles drawn from the canon of modern art.

Sunday in the Park (2010) features a group of gender-ambiguous people reclining on the grass near a lake (**fig 2.01**). Each of the eleven characters is in various states of undress, their remaining clothes being bright orange, red, purple, and blue. Although they only take up roughly ten percent of the canvas, the group of people in the bottom corner of the painting immediately draws the viewer’s eye. One set of bright turquoise thigh-high boots particularly stands out, and neon feathers, boas, hats, and umbrellas add to their attire. The collection of characters contrasts with the green foliage that surrounds them, and they gaze out at the blissful snow-tipped mountains, waterfall surroundings, and wispy clouds. On a small peninsula jutting out from the park, Miss Chief stands

¹⁰⁰ M. J. Thompson, “Kent Monkman,” *Border Crossings* 30, 3 (2011): 123.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, 125.

entirely in pink, in nothing but thigh-high boots, a long flowing scarf, and flowers in her hair. She turns to paint the loungers.

In a very similar place, possibly on the same lake as *Sunday in the Park*, Miss Chief stumbles upon five bathing women (**fig 2.02**). In *Empathy for the Less Fortunate* (2011) the same wispy clouds have turned somewhat ominous as they sweep by the top of the canvas. Again, rolling hills, snow-peaked mountains, waterfalls, and jutting grey rocks take up most of the scene. Down in the lake, however, fleshy pink bodies punctuate the still water and lush greenery. At the far left, a woman in the water raises her hand to wave hello. Next, furthest out in the lake, the viewer can see only the head of a second woman above the water. By the water's edge, a third woman stands wrapped in a white towel and stretches her arms above her head. Sitting on the grass, the fourth woman crouches with her hand under her chin. Lastly, closest to the viewer, we come to Miss Chief chatting with the fifth woman. Dressed in one of her most reserved outfits, Miss Chief has her hair in two braids. She dons a white skirt and blazer, white pumps, and a brown Louis Vuitton purse. She has leaned over to similarly braid the hair of one of the nude women.

In *Teaching the Lost* (2012), the smallest painting of these three, Miss Chief has immersed herself in a new group of loungers foregrounded against Group of Seven-esque trees (**fig 2.03**). *Teaching the Lost*, however, is one of Monkman's darkest paintings to date, and features very few bright colours. In fact, uncharacteristically, the only pink of the painting can be found on Miss Chief's headdress and her pumps. The dark grey clouds roll overhead as the sun tries to break through. The surrounding valleys and mountains are far away on the other side of the lake, thus the characters are very much the focus. Five beige and blue characters relax on the grass and one oblong head peaks

out over a large, grey boulder. Down by the water's edge, a blue woman plays with rocks as a thin man strides out of the water behind her. Looming large in the centre of the painting, Miss Chief stands in a dark blue toga. She lights a pipe and surveys the scene. In each of these paintings, once the viewer is immersed far enough, they could recognize that Miss Chief is a gender-ambiguous character due to her traditionally masculine physique, with traditionally feminine attire and mannerisms. The wall plaques beside the paintings identify her character as Two-Spirit. In this way, by foregrounding Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in these paintings, museumgoers are potentially introduced to a new gender- and sexually-ambiguous identity. Monkman's inclusion of a Two-Spirit person in his paintings has significant implications for understandings of settler colonialism and homonationalism today.

Historical and Contemporary Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is a social formation where settlers come to stay in a place and are founders of social and political ideologies that maintain their distinct sovereign capacity. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington state, "The discourse on settler colonialism describes how, fortified by modernizing narratives and ideology, a population from the metropole moves to occupy a territory and fashion a new society in a space conceptualized as vacant and free: as available for the taking."¹⁰² As Patrick Wolfe further describes, "settler colonialism destroys to replace"¹⁰³ and the invasion is the embedding of *structure* rather than an event. The idea of a settler colonial structure is different from

¹⁰² Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, ed. *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 1.

¹⁰³ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, 4 (2006): 388.

colonialism because colonialism seeks to maintain the systems and people that are in place in order to profit from them, instead settler colonialism seeks to remove the original systems and peoples. Settler colonialism therefore necessitates that Indigenous peoples are scripted as dispensable, or, in the case of First Nations persons of Canada, as unwelcomed outsiders.

Settler control is further nuanced in its proliferation: “The efforts of colonialism are usually directed at winning over the hearts and minds of peoples who have previously been geographically enveloped by imperial forces.”¹⁰⁴ This is accomplished by the creation of a set of concepts, identities, and narratives of history that while thoroughly ideological, are not perceived as such by their adherents, who consider them quite natural (and have become naturalized). These sets of concepts, identities, and narratives of history that legitimize settler colonialism have been constructed and reproduced through art practices.

Monkman’s paintings speak to the history of two art historical tropes – that of Romanticized landscape and Modern abstracted bodies – and their impact on the creation of cultural consciousness about interactions between European settlers and First Nations peoples in the canon of art history. Paul Kane is one such artist whose work Monkman appropriates and critiques. Kane was a nineteenth-century artist who traveled west across Canada in order to “rescue from oblivion [First Nations’] primitive looks and customs.”¹⁰⁵ He is now famous for writing about and painting First Nations peoples, in such works as *Indian Encampment on Lake Huron* (1848-1850) or *The Surveyor: Portrait of Captain John Henry Lefroy* (1845-1846). *Indian Encampment on Lake Huron* is a detailed

¹⁰⁴ Adam J Barker, “The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State,” *American Indian Quarterly* 33, 3 (2009): 326.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Grace Glueck, “Witness to a Dying Way of Tribal Life,” *New York Times* 22 April 2005.

narrative painting of a First Nations settlement, filled with teepees, canoes, and rolling romantic clouds. Similarly, *The Surveyor* (**fig. 2.04**) positions Captain John Henry Lefroy – a colonial administrator – in a confident and authoritative center pose, while the background shows a conquered First Nations woman beside a teepee. In Monkman's paintings, however, Miss Chief takes on the role of grand artist and surveyor. As Miss Chief paints the characters and surroundings in *Sunday in the Park*, for instance, she stands almost centrally in the painting. Although Miss Chief is smaller than the other loungers, the viewer's eye is ultimately drawn to Miss Chief as all of the other figures focus on her. Miss Chief stands strong and proud as she looks out at the vast vista of North America (**fig. 2.05**). In this way, Monkman points to, and reverses stereotypical representations of a 'Romanticized Canadiana' in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century.

And as one art critic aptly explains:

Monkman knows the canon well enough to be able to read between, around, and through the narratives that we have come to accept as our heritage. The stereotypes, the racism, and violence, and the power struggles that the New World was founded upon (and that are perpetuated to this day) are of course fertile ground for a contemporary artist of Cree ancestry.¹⁰⁶

Monkman's work takes these historical representations of 'Canadianness' as seen in works such as those by Kane, reproduces them, and adds Miss Chief Eagle Testickle.

Monkman states

The whole body of work is about revisiting these early images that represent the very safe and secure foundation of the mythology and exploration of the West. When you look at these paintings as an aboriginal person, you realize how subjective they are. So when I make these paintings I'm not necessarily repainting history, but I'm nudging people toward seeing that there are these big missing narratives.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Liss, 80.

¹⁰⁷ David Furnish, "Kent Monkman," *Interview* 36, 2 (2006): 136.

Monkman's paintings appropriate the traditional narratives of the interactions between colonisers and First Nations peoples and unravel their absurdity. For instance, Monkman queers the mythological depiction of 'Indian encounter' by instead placing the voyeuristic imposer in a white skirt-suit and pumps. In *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*, as an example, Miss Chief is the person who has stumbled upon the bathing women and attempts to impose her own fashions on them: by braiding the one woman's hair (**fig. 2.06**).

Furthermore, Monkman's paintings play with these canonical histories of modern art. Many of his artworks include recognizable modernist styles or characters (**fig. 2.07**). These are intentional references that many viewers of the artworks would immediately recognize. In *Sunday in the Park*, Monkman quotes George Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the La Grande Jatte* (**fig. 2.08**). An extremely famous pointillist work created in 1884 and now in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, Seurat's painting reduced images to elemental shapes like cones and circles, and broke forms down into components of colour. Monkman utilizes Seurat's composition of lounging aristocrats in *Sunday in the Park*. However, these loungers are now clothed in bright, extravagant colours and textiles. Monkman has appropriated the lounging aristocrats into his typical – arguably identifiable – overly elaborate style. In this way, Monkman makes the avant-garde figures of Seurat look just as absurd as the historical, sublime landscapes that they are set against.

Empathy for the Less Fortunate moves forward twenty-three years in art history to reference Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907). Picasso's painting opened the door for radically new methods of representation as he fractured the figures' bodies and interwove them (**fig. 2.09**). Now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York

City, this early cubist work explored the tension between representation and abstraction, and created a scandal at the time because of its harshness and fragmentation. Not only was *Les Demoiselles* an influential work for Western art history, but Picasso himself enjoyed a life of fortune due to the fame of his artworks. Monkman's *Demoiselles* are, instead, bathing in a pristine lake and sitting on its shores. Unmistakably replicating Picasso's work, Monkman has separated the individual women and incorporated the figures into his narrative as Miss Chief interacts with them. In *Les Demoiselles*, Picasso painted two of the women with African mask-like faces. I offer that Monkman utilizes *Les Demoiselles* to reference Picasso's primitivism as a way of noting that the same Othering discourse occurred in paintings of First Nations persons. In this way, *Empathy for the Less Fortunate* once again points to cultural appropriations and art history's Eurocentrism.

Finally, *Teaching the Lost* employs various art historical references in one painting. One of Monkman's most recent artworks, *Teaching the Lost* includes Picasso's *Bathers with a Toy Boat* (**fig. 2.10**) playing on the sand as Henry Moore's *Recumbent Figure* (**fig. 2.11**) lounges by their side. Simultaneously, Alberto Giacometti's *Walking Man* (**fig. 2.12**) strides out of the water alongside Henry Moore's *Seated Woman* (**fig. 2.13**). Miss Chief stands in the middle amongst these figures, smoking her pipe. *Teaching the Lost* is almost a who's-who of canonical modern artists. In this way, Monkman could be placing Miss Chief amongst these canonical artists to, once again, engender her position as a painter challenging the European historic gaze. In addition, Monkman could be referencing the idea of progression in modern art. These famous artists were each instrumental to the notion of art innovation and creating artworks that constituted a break from past practices. This idea of progress was similarly a driving force of colonization.

The artworks referenced by Monkman in *Teaching the Lost* are also respectively found in collections of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, the Tate Britain, and the public garden Hirshhorn Museum (The Mall, Washington, DC). Monkman therefore transposed artworks from extremely well-known art museums. In doing so, Monkman distinctly speaks to the place of the museum, and the role of the museum, in perpetuating many of these stereotypes. Moreover, by including these largely unmistakable figures, I suggest that Monkman further seduces the museumgoer into his storyline. At first, the museumgoer is stopped by the grand, sublime vistas that Monkman meticulously reproduces. Then, they are drawn into the recognizable modern art historical figures and tropes. Finally, they must wonder about this central character. In these three paintings, she is painting, inspecting, and conducting the other characters. Miss Chief is evidently the centre of attention, and Two-Spirit characters are brought to the fore. By combating these mythologies through centering Two-Spirit peoples in these stories, Monkman queers settler colonialism and homonationalism.

Settler Heterocolonialism and Homonationalism

Theories of settler heterocolonialism address the way the settler colonial project relied on, and was constituted by, the heterosexualizing of Indigenous spaces and bodies. Following a number of contemporary scholars, I maintain that it is important to understand the extent to which heterosexuality in contemporary North America was constitutive of colonial power just as colonial power was constitutive of it.¹⁰⁸ Prior to colonization, First Nations identities and power structures were often more fluid than

¹⁰⁸ Maria Lugones, "Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, 1 (2007): 202.

European constructions, such as the Dakota peoples' historical practice of polygamy and multiple gender traditions¹⁰⁹ or the Cree *ayekkwew*, which means "neither man nor woman" and/or "man and woman."¹¹⁰ However, upon European settlement, colonizers imposed heterosexuality as a way to buttress colonial rule. More often than not, this heterosexualizing was scripted as 'civilizing.' Mark Rifkin observes: "The effort to civilize American Indians and the attendant repudiation of indigenous traditions can be understood as significantly contributing to the institutionalization of the 'heterosexual imagery,' in Chrys Ingraham's evocative phrase."¹¹¹

In *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*, again, Monkman twists the 'civilizing' mission to focus on Miss Chief as she braids the bewildered woman's hair in the style of Miss Chief herself. The title of this work also suggests a power dynamic between Miss Chief and the women, as we are meant to see the women (as colonisers are often meant to see First Nations persons) as less fortunate. However, since the painting produces this scene in a humorous way with the bemused look on the woman's face, the museumgoer may not recognize the problematic nature of these imposed 'civilizing missions.' Anibal Quijano refers to the imposition of heterocolonialism through civilizing missions in 'Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.' Quijano states, "In constituting this social classification, coloniality permeates all aspects of social existence

¹⁰⁹ Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 165.

¹¹⁰ Walter Williams, *The Spirit and The Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1986): 82. There are many more examples of non-normative gender formations in Indigenous societies: Anthropologists write that Two-Spirit persons were considered not men, however (referenced as "berdaches" in colonial and academic literature) but a third gender (Will Roscoe, "How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity," in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, ed. G. Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1993) 336-349. Some anthropologists also referred to this third-gender person as "women-men" (Sabine Lang, *Men as Women, Women as Men* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xvi.)

¹¹¹ Rifkin, 6.

and gives rise to new social and geocultural identities.”¹¹² Further, the classification of heterosexuality is “the deepest and most enduring expression of colonial domination.”¹¹³ To put this more simply, “Heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural. Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nation-state rule their citizens.”¹¹⁴ However, we have internalized these logics. Andrea Smith adds, “Native sovereignty struggles are themselves often articulated within, rather than in resistance to, the logics of settler colonialism.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, contemporary queer First Nations activists and scholars call for a radical rethinking of structures, hierarchies, binaries, and classifications.

As noted above, “historical Native ideas about gender did not employ the gender-binary, bodily-sex-equals-gender view commonly found in European society.”¹¹⁶ Rather, genders were malleable and alterable over the course of a person’s lifetime.¹¹⁷ Settler colonialism, then, contributed to the codification of these genders. If, as Maria Lugones holds, “categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic is central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality,”¹¹⁸ Miss Chief can thus be understood as complicating these mentalities and denaturalizing colonialism. By

¹¹² Anibal Quijano, “Colonialidad del Poder y Clasificación Social.” *Journal of World Systems Research* 5, 2 (2000): 342 as cited in Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.”

¹¹³ Anibal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder, globalización y democracia,” *Revista de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León* 4, 7–8 (2001–2002): 1 as cited in Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.”

¹¹⁴ Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, 1-2 (2010): 61.

¹¹⁵ Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies,” 60.

¹¹⁶ Brian Joseph Gilley, *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006): 8.

¹¹⁷ Sabine Lang, *Men as Women, Women as Men* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998): 59-66 and Will Roscoe, “How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity,” In *Third Sex, Third Gender*. Ed. G. Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1993): 338-341.

¹¹⁸ Maria Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, 4 (2010): 742.

denaturalizing colonialism, I mean recognizing that these ideas about race, gender, and sexualities are indeed indebted to settler colonialism.

One of the ways that sexualities are indebted to settler colonialism is through contemporary settler homonationalism. As has been addressed already in this thesis, homonationalism is homonormative nationalism. Settler colonialism, and its embedded structures, has become a foundational characteristic – both physically and mentally – of what is now known as Canada. Furthermore, as contemporary LGBT politics seek assimilation and nationalist recognition, these movements often appeal to the heterosexual models that focus on the normalcy of its members. In this way, settler homonationalism maintains and upholds the same binary gender and sexuality structures of settler heterocolonialism. The persons that are often expelled from homonormative projects include trans persons, queers of colour, queers with disabilities, and Two-Spirit persons.

Monkman's reclamation of Two-Spirit identity in *Miss Chief* and the implications of this in art world discourse, I argue, contribute to the denaturalization of settler homonationalism. *Miss Chief* is a dialogic, hybrid character that oscillates between the poles and binaries of male/female and Indigenous/Settler. In this way, her ambiguous gender/sexuality position disrupts the rigid conceptions of colonialism, and therefore disrupts homonationalism's logics and workings. As M. Melissa Elston writes,

If the typical rhetorical features of the aforementioned European-derived art movements construct Indianness as a state of disappearance, dependence or savagery, then Monkman's present-day disruptions of the embedded aesthetic and social codes signal a shift in this state: a shift from object-status to subject-status, from victimhood to action, from elegiac absence to living presence.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Elston, 181.

Miss Chief strides into the paintings as the person of power (**fig. 2.14**) because in each painting, she is the operator of the story: painter, instructor, or conductor. Revolving the story around Miss Chief moves her status to *subject* and the Europeans to *object*. This overly simplistic reversal can be seen as problematic because it does not break down the power hierarchies fundamental to these interactions, and this critique will be addressed later in the paper. Nevertheless, the reversal demands that the museumgoer examine their position in this discussion. As Smith argues:

A conversation between Native studies and queer theory is important because the logics of settler colonialism *and* decolonization must be queered in order properly to speak to the genocidal present that not only continues to disappear indigenous peoples but reinforces the structures of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy that affect all peoples.¹²⁰

A Two-Spirit Critique

First Nations queer and Two-Spirit critiques intertwine in their understanding of the fundamental necessity for decolonization in any queer movement. And, only with decolonization and the denaturalization of colonialism can queer movements proceed inclusively. Following the theories of scholars who either call for the centering of queerness in Indigenous studies or the centering of decolonization in queer studies, I maintain that Monkman's work is a poignant place to see these movements and theories coming together.

As noted previously, contemporary homonationalist projects and processes in North America developed from power hierarchies between settlers and First Nations

¹²⁰ Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," 64.

groups.¹²¹ Hence, Monkman's reclamation and mobilization of Two-Spirit identity in his artworks can be seen as a critique of, and a source of resistance to, settler homonationalism in Canada.

By interjecting a prosopopoeiac stand-in—a queer, indigenous body in drag—into otherwise conventionally arranged European landscapes, Monkman disrupts the “vanishing Indian” myth which such scenes have historically supported and perpetuated, in tandem with imperialist texts; what's more, Miss Chief's obvious queerness disrupts the legacy of colonial heteronormativity, revaluing precontact sexualities and understandings of gender among the Americas' ethnically diverse nations, which in many cases originally included the concept of the Two-Spirit.¹²²

As noted, prior to European settler colonization, many Indigenous groups (such as the Cree, Lakota, Mohave, Navajo, Ojibwe, and Winnebago peoples) accepted and even honoured Two-Spirited members.¹²³ Two-Spirit – the wide varieties of people for whom gender and its performances are non-binariad – came to be known as this overarching term in 1990: “The term *Two-Spirit* was chosen as an intertribal term to be used in English as a way to communicate numerous tribal traditions and social categories of gender outside dominant European binaries.”¹²⁴

As such, Two-Spirit critique has much to contribute to queer studies by unsettling settler homonationalism, as queer theory often generally neglects the normalizing structures of colonialist logics in contemporary theories and discourse.¹²⁵ As Qwo-Li Driskill notes, “No understanding of sexual and gender constructions on colonized and occupied land can take place without an understanding of the ways colonial projects

¹²¹ Scott Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

¹²² Elston, 188.

¹²³ Williams.

¹²⁴ Qwo-Li Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, 1-2 (2010): 72.

¹²⁵ Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies,” 43.

continually police sexual and gender lines.”¹²⁶ These theories thus need to *centre* Two-Spirit identities and politics, which is metaphorically and literally what Monkman does in his paintings. Monkman’s work can be seen to achieve this firstly, simply through the representation of Two-Spirit identity, which makes these identities visible, and is significant because such people have – historically and contemporarily – gone through a process of biological and cultural genocide. Secondly, by compositionally centering Miss Chief in the paintings, Monkman creates a visual pun to figuratively centre Two-Spirit dialogue. Next, by situating a contemporary Two-Spirit identity in a historicized landscape – the same land on which the First Nations were romantically and Otheringly painted by artists, and on the same land that Two-Spirit persons and their stories were killed by early settlers – a space is opened for a re-writing of histories. In other words, the paintings exhibit trans-temporality.

By foregrounding a character that is simultaneously First Nations, queer, and gender-ambiguous in his paintings, Monkman’s works bring these discussions together. In *Sunday in the Park*, for example, the nonchalant gender-ambiguous characters are the only figures on the canvas. These paintings, then, can be seen as moving away from the policing of sexual and gender lines, as Miss Chief and her friends promote silliness and fluidity rather than binaries and limitations (**fig. 2.15**).

However, Monkman’s paintings need to be conceptualized as separate from Two-Spirit theorizing. These paintings are on display at national museums, international biennales, and in the private collections of notable collectors and consequently reach wide audiences. For instance, last month three Kent Monkman artworks were on display at the *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* exhibition at the National Gallery of

¹²⁶ Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques,” 73.

Canada.¹²⁷ Swarms of people surrounded his large painting, discussing the narrative, attention to detail, and possible meanings. In this regard, Monkman's paintings reach broader audiences of people who may not be knowledgeable or well-versed in Two-Spirit histories and critiques. This is important for the political potential of a Two-Spirit critique. Yet, on the other hand, these paintings do not *necessarily* lend themselves to a Two-Spirit critique, given the likelihood that not all viewers will automatically understand the history and stories that I suggest. Therefore, my theoretical critique has its limits. Nevertheless, Monkman's paintings do indeed spark political and theoretical conversations just as a museumgoer reads a wall plaque, catalogue entry, or exhibition review and then goes home to research this new term 'Two-Spirit' that they encountered.

Thinking about Decolonization

Monkman's paintings such as *Sunday in the Park*, *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*, and *Teaching the Lost* challenge museumgoers to recognize the implication of their role as settlers. Adam Barker offers the definition of settler as: "Most peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants or who are otherwise members of the 'Settler society,' which is founded on co-opted lands and resources."¹²⁸ I think that specifically through Monkman's Two-Spirit critique of settler sexualities, his paintings "call non-Natives to ask how nation, gender, and sexuality interrelate for them in settler society."¹²⁹ As these artworks are on display at major Canadian and international museums, a large number of people must confront

¹²⁷ For more information on the exhibition and its artworks, visit <http://www.gallery.ca/sakahan/>.

¹²⁸ Barker, 328.

¹²⁹ Scott Morgensen, "Unsettling Queer Politics: What can Non-Natives Learn from Two-Spirit Organizing?" *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, eds. Q. Driskill et al (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011): 145.

these ideas: “Monkman seizes upon the irony in this cultural expansionist perspective, and, in true prankster style, steals the earlier artists’ very brushstrokes. The viewer is seduced by these sumptuous gilt-framed paintings of mountain vistas and lakes, but up close a bawdy male line-up engages in nefarious doings.”¹³⁰ These nefarious doings not only sexualize common tropes of First Nations interactions, but introduce wide audiences to a startling radical character: Miss Chief Eagle Testickle.

Although I have suggested a number of ways in which Monkman’s paintings can be seen as a place of resistance against settler homonationalism, there are nevertheless certain criticisms to be made. Monkman’s simple reversal of the settler occupation and Othering aesthetics does not speak to the complexities of interactions and perceptions. As Kevin Harington argues, “The heart of the problem here is that those who want to see margins and resistance as a source of political opposition within society are reluctant to see such activities as implicated with a notion of social order that they want to see challenged.”¹³¹ In this way, the paintings can be seen as replicating those stereotypes that Monkman seeks to unravel by staying within – and simply flipping – these strategies. Furthermore, Monkman’s practice of focusing on historical rather than contemporary events, I argue, provides a conceptual distancing for the museumgoer. In this regard, these stories are understood as past mistakes, rather than current issues, and the settler museumgoer might not necessarily feel implicated in these struggles. Nevertheless, by elucidating the mythologized history of First Nations and settler interactions, along with an examination of how these understandings are based in heteropatriarchy, I argue that Monkman’s work opens up doors for decolonization. Following Driskill, “By using the

¹³⁰ Johnson, 110.

¹³¹ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia & Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997): 35.

term *decolonization*, I am speaking of ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation.”¹³²

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, after twenty years of drafting, was finally adopted in 2007. There were only four votes against the adoption: from the governments of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.¹³³ This action speaks to the continued contemporary imperative to deny sovereignty and land rights to Indigenous peoples by these settler states.¹³⁴ The work of contemporary First Nations artists in Canada bring to the fore many of these issues, and complicates colonialism with new understandings of religion, sexuality, abilities, bodies, and culture(s). This can be seen especially with an artist such as Kent Monkman who has already gained international notoriety.

The artist’s dual identity as Cree and European is central to this fascination as he revisits North American historical events and western cultural representations, often under the guise of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, the sexy and extravagant diva warrior. Monkman’s alter ego brazenly moves in and out of various historical conjunctures disrupting, overturning, or debunking foundational myths of civilization.¹³⁵

By disrupting, overturning, and debunking these civilizing myths, Monkman’s Miss Chief “helps break the cycle of projection in which Western observers constantly

¹³² Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques,” 69.

¹³³ All four expressed particular concern over Article 26 which initially read: “Indigenous peoples have the right to own, develop, control and use the lands and territories, including the total environment of the lands, air, waters, coastal seas, sea-ice, flora and fauna and other resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. This includes the right to the full recognition of their laws, traditions and customs, land-tenure systems and institutions for the development and management of resources, and the right to effective measures by States to prevent any interference with, alienation of or encroachment upon these rights.” (“United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” United Nations, (September 13 2007) http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf, accessed April 10 2013.)

¹³⁴ Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds, *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place, and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 18.

¹³⁵ Michele Theriault, ed, *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman* (Montreal: Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2012): 6.

replicate heterosexual binarism wherever they turn their gaze.”¹³⁶ Miss Chief’s Two-Spirit identity is also a timely place of critique for queer theory. As Driskill explains, “*Two-Spirit* is a word that itself is a critique. It is a challenge not only to the field of anthropology’s use of the word *berdache*, but also to the white-dominated GLBTQ community’s labels and taxonomies. It claims Native traditions as precedents for understanding gender and sexuality, and asserts that Two-Spirit people are vital to our tribal communities.”¹³⁷ As such, through his dual incorporation of historical narratives and contemporary queer First Nations subjects, Kent Monkman’s paintings shift the focus of art theory and homonationalism to include a consciousness of their ongoing colonial realities.

¹³⁶ Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000): 210.

¹³⁷ Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques,” 72-73.

Figures



Fig. 2.01 Kent Monkman, *Sunday in the Park*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 182.88 x 243.84 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2.02 Kent Monkman, *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 120.65 x 181.61 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2.03 Kent Monkman, *Teaching the Lost*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 60.96 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2.04 Paul Kane, *Scene in the Northwest: Portrait of Captain John Henry Lefroy (The Surveyor)*, 1845-1846, oil on canvas, 50.9 x 78.7 cm. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/24/Kane_The_Surveyor.jpg/300px-Kane_The_Surveyor.jpg]



Fig. 2.05 Kent Monkman, Detail of *Sunday in the Park*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 182.88 x 243.84 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2.06 Kent Monkman, Detail of *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 120.65 x 181.61 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2.07 Kent Monkman, *The Academy*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 182.88 x 274.32 cm. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.
[\[http://phillipcoupaljuicyheart.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/the-academy-kent-monkman-2008-ago.jpg\]](http://phillipcoupaljuicyheart.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/the-academy-kent-monkman-2008-ago.jpg).



Fig. 2.08 George Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the La Grande Jatte*, 1884-1886, oil on canvas, 207.6 x 308 cm. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.
[\[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/A_Sunday_on_La_Grande_Jatte%2C_Georges_Seurat%2C_1884.jpg\]](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/A_Sunday_on_La_Grande_Jatte%2C_Georges_Seurat%2C_1884.jpg)



Fig. 2.09 Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.5 x 233.7 cm. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art (New York City). [<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/3/36>].

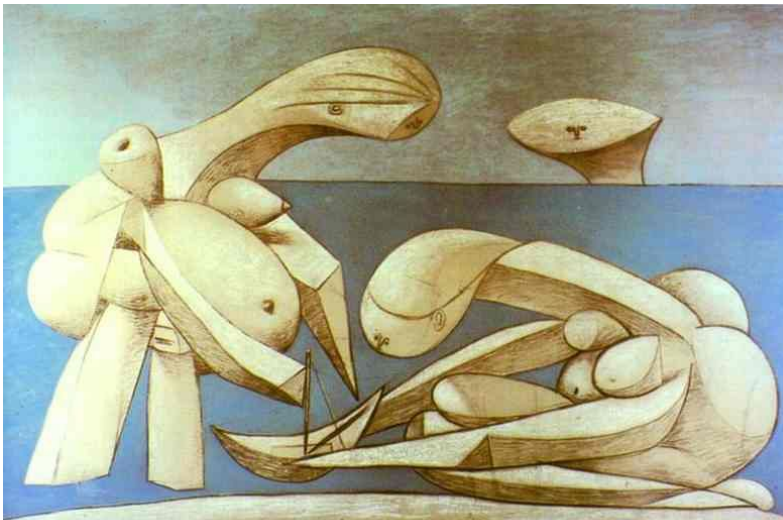


Fig. 2.10 Pablo Picasso, *On the Beach (La Baignade)*, 1937, oil, conté crayon, and chalk on canvas, 129.1 x 194 cm. Courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection (Venice). [http://annex.guggenheim.org/collections/media/full/76.2553.5_ph_web.jpg].



Fig. 2.11 Henry Moore, *Recumbent Figure*, 1938, Green Horton stone, 8.89 x 13.27 x 7.37 cm. Courtesy of the Tate Britain. [<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/moore-recumbent-figure-n05387>].



Fig. 2.12 Alberto Giacometti, *L'homme qui marche I* (*The Walking Man I*), 1961, bronze, 183 cm, Courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh). [<http://artpulsemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/lot-8-giacometti-lhomme-qui-marche-i-a.gif>].



Fig. 2.13 Henry Moore, *Seated Woman*, 1956-1957, cast 1962, bronze, 157.5 c 142.9 x 105.1 cm. Courtesy of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, DC). [http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu/search-results/search-result-details/?edan_search_value=86.3277].



Fig. 2.14 Kent Monkman, Detail of *Teaching the Lost*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 60.96 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2.15 Kent Monkman, Detail of *Sunday in the Park*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 182.88 x 243.84 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

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3.

(Pink)Washing the Conflict in *Zero Degrees of Separation*

This is the face of the nation. The bulldozer. Power. Power and
destruction. In the most aggressive and brutal way possible.
– Ezra¹³⁸

In *Zero Degrees of Separation*, the bulldozer is used as a tangible image to represent Israeli destruction, demolition, and deportation of Palestinian homes and lives in Israel/Palestine. This is just one of the beautifully simple, yet conceptually complex, images from Elle Flanders's 2005 documentary film. In *Zero Degrees* (**fig. 3.01**), we meet Ezra and Selim, and Edit and Samira, two couples living in Israel and negotiating within this struggle. Interspersed with these storylines, we watch home video footage of Flanders's grandparents who helped to establish the State of Israel (**fig. 3.02**). Set against a simple musical score by David Wall, Flanders has spliced these storylines together, with intertitle cards providing political and personal facts that help illustrate the narrative.

Though *Zero Degrees* juxtaposes immigrant and indigenous populations, "...Flanders succeeds largely because she refuses to reduce the occupation to sexuality or sexuality to the occupation. Her film eloquently and deftly tackles the myriad ways in which the current situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has created obstacles, terror, violence, complicities, and complacencies — on both sides of the conflict."¹³⁹ In other words, Flanders attempts to explain these stories without placing blame. Therefore, a fruitful discussion of homonationalism can take place in relation to this work.

¹³⁸ Quotation by Ezra (time: 48:02). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.

¹³⁹ Hoda El Shakry, "Apocalyptic Pasts, Orwellian Futures: Elle Flanders's *Zero Degrees of Separation*," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, 4 (2010): 613.

To set up my discussion, it is useful to cite Sarah Schulman at length, whose 2012 book *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, was particularly influential for this article,

Homonationalism describes a contemporary phenomenon... where white gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (and in some cases transsexuals) have won a full range of legal rights. Through marriage, parenthood, and family, they have become accepted and realigned with patriotic or nationalist ideologies of their countries. Instead of being feared as the threat to family and nation that they were once seen to be, this new integration under the most normative of terms is held up as a symbol of that country's commitment to progress and modernity. Some then identify with the racial and religious hegemony of their countries and join movements opposing immigration or racial and cultural difference.¹⁴⁰

In Israel/Palestine, homonational trends have seen the inclusion of Israeli LGBT persons in the military and marketing campaigns. However, this has come at the expense and dismissal of Palestinian rights. As will be addressed further, activists and academics particularly use the term 'pinkwashing' in Israel/Palestine to denote the use of 'gay-friendly' rhetoric to excuse or overshadow the Occupation and its related atrocities.

Though *Zero Degrees* clearly and unrepentantly relates present-day brutality against Palestinian people to the historical founding of the State of Israel,¹⁴¹ in my opinion, it does not seek to blame individuals. Instead, the film analyses overarching systems that led both to the necessity of Israel as a safe haven for Jewish people and the necessity for the de-Occupation of Israel today for Palestinian people. In this way, the film and I both do not attempt to answer the Israel/Palestinian question, as it is too complicated an issue with too many invested lives to treat lightly. Instead, *Zero Degrees*

¹⁴⁰ Sarah Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) 103-104.

¹⁴¹ Flanders has widely maintained that she did not attempt political neutrality in *Zero Degrees*. Instead, she was interested in telling her story as it came to her in relation to these different people.

of Separation and this critique can be seen as spaces in which to open the discussion of Israel/Palestine and move towards resolutions.

This article thus moves from a brief opening explanation of *Zero Degrees* to an in-depth discussion of how this film tackles its themes of the establishment of the State of Israel and contemporary homonationalism and pinkwashing. However, it is significant to note that this film was created before the term ‘pinkwashing’ was coined. In this way, *Zero Degrees* offers valuable insight into personal stories before the theory caught up to lived experiences. Thus, the film perhaps moves beyond homonational theory to show its limits, as *Zero Degrees* queers the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Introducing *Zero Degrees of Separation*

Zero Degrees of Separation opens with found home video footage from March 1950. Against a slow, simple piano melody, we see aristocratic-looking men and women pointing out to the Mediterranean Sea in excitement. Through intertitle cards that are dispersed throughout the film, we learn that it is June 2002. The filmmaker, Elle Flanders, has just discovered her grandparents’ – Chaim and Doris Morrison – film archive. It shows their involvement with the establishment of the State of Israel. Today, she has come to Israel to make a film about two queer couples, in each of which one person is Israeli and the other Palestinian.

We first encounter Ezra in his car, where he spends a lot of his time. Ezra is an antagonistic activist and plumber who uses his privileged status as Israeli to combat Palestinian injustices. The film cuts back to Flanders’s grandparents’ footage as they tour through the new Israel of the 1950s. They film destroyed roads, homes, and properties. We come back to the present day, where we meet Ezra’s boyfriend of four years, Selim,

as they work on the backyard of their home. We learn that Selim is under house arrest because he is living in Israel without a permit. He is a Palestinian Arab. However, half of Selim's family lives in Israel and he lived in Israel as a child. Nevertheless, the government will not give him Israeli citizenship. *Zero Degrees* transitions back to the grandparents' footage of Yemen Camp where poor men, women, and children are filmed with lines of tents behind them.

At a demonstration protesting the occupation, we meet another couple named Edit and Samira. Edit's Jewish family fled from Argentina to come to Israel. She recognizes, however, the problematic histories and contemporary atrocities perpetuated by the Israeli government: "I have no problem saying that we are to blame. Zionism did not take into account that there was another nation here. It could have been done differently, but it was not done differently... In my opinion, the only solution is to look forwards."¹⁴²

Simultaneously – shown over Edit's interview – we are back at the protest, where army vehicles have come to try to break through the people. They throw sound grenades and tear gas at the protesters. We then meet Samira, who talks about the difficulties of political negotiations when there are significant power differentials for the people involved. Samira refers to checkpoints and comments on how they disrupt personal freedoms for Arabs. Similarly, Selim talks about the many times that he has been arrested for protesting, throwing stones, and being in Jerusalem without a permit.

Zero Degrees therefore focuses on the various ways in which Arab bodies are demarcated and controlled by Israeli checkpoints, relocations, ditches, concrete blocks, gates, and the constant profiling and request for identification papers. In one scene, Ezra shows Flanders how old roads have been demolished so that cars cannot use them.

¹⁴² Edit (time: 21:48) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

Instead, people have to park their cars on the side and walk through the rubble. There are also some roads that are only for Israeli citizens. He states, “And it is usually an Aryan road – for Jews only.”¹⁴³

Interjected in these scenes and stories, we return to the Morrison’s footage. They show a group of new Israelis enjoying a bus tour (**fig. 3.03**), taking photographs with soldiers guarding the borders. In one scene, they walk through a marketplace and look at textiles. They also show people working in the field. The music playing in these scenes is always a simple piano cord, very nostalgic, almost like a lullaby. Roughly an hour into the movie, the historic footage shows a jubilant group of people standing around in the desert with military personnel. They are on a tour to witness military exercises. Back in the present, the film crew has come with Ezra to Susya, a historic Palestinian village. While speaking with the people who live there, a military jeep arrives. The soldiers ask about Ezra and whether the Palestinians are bothering him. Nonchalantly, they have a blindfolded man in the back of the truck (**fig. 3.04**). Ezra engages in a long conversation with the two young military men about the State of Israel and its role in the occupation.

At the close of the film, the 1950s footage shows a plane flying overhead. Supplies and people are dropped to the ground. Slow, melodic music plays. A soldier lands on the ground with his parachute and runs towards the camera (**fig. 3.05**). This is spliced into a contemporary soldier running towards the camera; in slow motion, he throws sound grenades and tear gas at the camera (**fig. 3.06**). The film has come full-circle to show the beginning, as supplies are dropped in Israel, of this story.

¹⁴³ Ezra (time: 28:46) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

It is now 2005. We learn, through intertitle cards, that neither of the couples are still together. In fact, Selim could not handle the state persecution in Jerusalem, so he moved back to Ramallah and married a woman. When the film's director and writer, Elle Flanders, first met Ezra, he said that he knew her name somewhere. When Flanders had lived in Israel as a child, Ezra worked as a gardener for her grandparents. She explains,

I tracked Ezra down in Israel and called him. I told him who I was, and he said, "Flanders? Don't I know you from somewhere?" and I said, "I don't think so." He said, "Aren't you the granddaughter of Chaim and Doris Morrison?" and I couldn't figure out how he made all the connections. Then he said, "Didn't you live here in the '70s?" At this point I was wondering if I was talking to the Israeli Secret Service. Then he said, "I remember you when you were a little girl. I used to work for your grandmother. I was the gardener and you lived at your grandparents house when you moved to Israel." I thought between that and the archival footage the film chose me.¹⁴⁴

All of these stories are connected. They are, although over fifty years apart, directly related. There are zero degrees of separation.

Intertwining Stories: Establishing the State of Israel

"This is the situation, it's shit... I don't want you to apologize, but I want you to go out on the streets and speak out." – Samira¹⁴⁵

Zero Degrees of Separation draws on the history of the establishment of the State of Israel through the incorporation of film footage from Chaim and Doris Morrison – filmmaker Elle Flanders' grandparents. By interspersing these two narratives – the establishment and the contemporary ramifications of the establishment – Flanders forces the viewer to recognize how these stories are undoubtedly connected. Through the use of

¹⁴⁴ Flanders quoted Amy Dalness, "State of Removal: An Interview with *Zero Degrees of Separation* Filmmaker Elle Flanders," *Alibi.com* 15, 39 (2006). <http://alibi.com/feature/16487/State-of-Removal.html>. Accessed 28 June 2013.

¹⁴⁵ Samira (time: (46:10) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

intertitle cards, Flanders succinctly problematizes Israeli state practices, and through the use of the Morrison's home footage, she brings these stories together.

Following the Second World War, according to Sarah Schulman, "The United States and the Allies needed a strong military base in the Middle East, and there was widespread guilt about the lack of global aid during the genocide. So creating the state of Israel as a place to dump the refugees and build a military footing in the region for the West served everybody's needs."¹⁴⁶ Hence, the State of Israel was established. However, Schulman continues, "The desire to leave the diaspora and have our own nationalist state where we make the rules and dominate other people was an alien paradigm shift with rapid, profound consequences on Jewish self-perception."¹⁴⁷ It was unknown, unrecognized, or ignored that the creation of Israel would lead to one of the largest refugee problems and one of the longest standing conflicts of the twentieth century.

In 2006, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees stated that: "By far the most protracted and largest of all refugee problems in the world today is that of the Palestinian refugees, whose plight dates back fifty-seven years."¹⁴⁸ The history of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict dates back at least to the nineteenth century; however, the effect of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War is worth noting. As John Collins explains, "For Israeli Jews, 1948 was surely a kind of beginning, but even more profoundly, it represented the end of a nightmare. For Palestinians, *Al Nakba* (catastrophe) remains the point of

¹⁴⁶ Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *State of the World's Refugees 2006: Human Displacement in the New Millennium* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

collective trauma generating a host of subsequent and continuing traumas.”¹⁴⁹ Displaced Palestinian photographer Sama Alshaibi describes this trauma:

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948, known to Palestinians as “Al Nakba” (“The Catastrophe” or “The Disaster”), was built on a systematic destruction and depopulation of more than four hundred villages, massacres, looting, and the displacement from the region of 800,000 of the 900,000 Palestinians who lived there. Currently, there are more than four million registered Palestinians and descendants living in the diaspora, as a consequence of typical birthrates, subsequent wars, two intifadas, and a brutal occupation. Millions more are displaced from their own families’ land and continue to live in internal exile throughout Occupied Palestine and Israel, prompting Palestine’s poet laureate, Mahmoud Darwish, to ask, “Where do the birds fly after the last sky?”¹⁵⁰

In *Zero Degrees*, Samira and Edit talked about coming to terms as a couple with Independence Day or Al Nakba. For Edit, it was hard for her to hear Samira talk about this day negatively, because this place “saved the life of [her] family”¹⁵¹ (**fig. 3.07**). She continues, “If the state of Israel did not exist, and we had not immigrated to the State of Israel, my parents would not be alive today.” However, for Samira, this day holds very different meaning: “Independence day is mourning. Not because of Israel’s Independence, but because of other people’s grief, at whose expense it was achieved, and continues to be at their expense... People who were uprooted from their lands so that in certain places there are celebrations and in other places there’s sorrow”¹⁵² (**fig. 3.08**).

In this way, *Zero Degrees* treats the establishment of Israel with some care and complexity. Although the film generally critiques the occupation through the stories of Selim, Samira, and other Palestinians who are submitted to daily atrocities, Flanders also

¹⁴⁹ John Collins, “A Dream Deterred: Palestine from Total War to Total Peace,” in *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture*, edited by Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, 169-185 (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 169.

¹⁵⁰ Sama Alshaibi, “Memory Work in the Palestinian Diaspora,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 27, no. 2 (2006): 30.

¹⁵¹ Edit (Time: 33:28) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁵² Samira (time: 34:30) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

recognizes the perceived need for Israel by Jewish people.¹⁵³ As Ezra notes, “Many things are overlooked here and it’s a shame. Because they established a state after much trouble and persecution and suddenly we find ourselves doing the same thing and finding justifications for it.”¹⁵⁴

In 1948, there were 600 000 Jews and 1 200 000 Palestinians living in Palestine (**fig. 3.09**). By 1949, over five hundred Palestinian villages were emptied of their inhabitants and approximately 800 000 people were made refugees.¹⁵⁵ In the Morrison’s home footage from 1950, we see destroyed roads, homes, and properties. They filmed these desolate and demolished towns as free for the taking. At one point, a dishevelled Palestinian man comes up to an aristocratic Israeli man on the street (**fig. 3.10**). A woman walks by and laughs at him (**fig 3.11**). They talk and he moves on. In another scene, the tour bus of new Israelis has come to Yemen Camp. There are poor families living in tents, some without shoes (**fig. 3.12**). As the aristocrats voyeuristically film the poor refugees, children surround an Israeli man and he tosses money or candy at them (**fig. 3.13**). This happens again around another man.

As Edward Said explains: “Left behind were one hundred twenty thousand (now one million) who subsequently became Israelis, a minority constituting about 18 percent of the state’s population today [dated 2000], but not fully fledged citizens in anything more

¹⁵³ For, in my opinion, an excellent introduction to the nuanced, complex situation of a Jewish person coming to terms with Israel’s Occupation and atrocities, see the “Introduction: Before” to Sarah Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-22. “We see how brutality bred brutality, and there is no higher moral model to point to. We see Europe continuing its lack of accountability and anti-Semitism, and we see no alternative that feels safe. So we lie to ourselves, because the truth is so much more frightening. The truth is that Israel’s policies do not make the world a safer place for Jews or anyone else” (Schulman, 17).

¹⁵⁴ Ezra (time: 9:23-9:26) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁵⁵ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006) cited in Collins, 170.

than name.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, there are 2.5 million Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza. Said furthers that: “Israeli is the only state in the world which is not the state of its actual citizens, but of the whole Jewish people, who consequently have rights that non-Jews do not.”¹⁵⁷ While I disagree with Said’s statement that Israel is the only state in the world wherein this is the case (for instance, look at the First Nations peoples of Canada), this is nevertheless effective in highlighting the disparity of rights between Jewish and non-Jewish people living in Israel. As will be addressed later, *Zero Degrees* particularly focuses on the disparity in rights through the example of Selim.

For example, the Israeli government has dictated that ninety-three percent of the land in Israel is characterized as Jewish, and as such, a non-Jewish person cannot lease, sell, or buy that land.¹⁵⁸ In this way, Israeli government programs have attempted to eliminate any Palestinian land rights in order to promote itself as a modern, European nation, effectively removing all traces of Palestinian heritage. Adds Ezra, “There was a denial here of the Mizrachim (Arab Jews) who came to this country. There was a rejection of their background, their language, their culture, their smells, their colours. There was a desire to establish a European country here, another European colony. There’s a rejection of ‘the Orient’ (**fig. 3.14**). It’s seen in a negative light (**fig. 3.15**). A negative view overall.” As Henry Giroux explains, “Under the dictates of pseudo-patriotism, dissent is stifled in the face of a growing racism that condemns Arabs and people of colour as less than civilized.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, as the Morrison’s filmed the refugee Arabs as backward and bizarre, they contributed to the Othering of Arab people in

¹⁵⁶ Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), 267-268.

¹⁵⁷ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, 268.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism* (Aurora, ON: Garamond Press, 2004), xx.

Israel/Palestine that still persists today. Their footage, for instance, includes a man walking with his camel by the side of the road (**fig. 3.16**) and families sitting outside their homes.

Since the 1990s, most cultural theorists have embraced the term ‘diaspora’ as a general concept to describe the various situations of Palestinians “on the outside.”¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, some argue that the

Palestinian refugee populations are evidence of Israel’s colonial settler politics, which in the worst of cases in the first Arab-Israeli war amounted to an ethnic cleansing of large areas of historic Palestine of the Arab population, and more recently has been marked by ongoing erosion of the Palestinian land base in East Jerusalem and the West Bank through the continual construction of settlements in the occupied territory.¹⁶¹

Zero Degrees uses the imagery of the bulldozer and the wall to show the delimiting movement for Arabs living in Israeli/Palestine. For instance, in the Morrison’s footage, they stand around and take photographs with Israeli soldiers guarding the newly erected borders (**fig. 3.17**) while Arab children are seen laying in the background (**fig. 3.18**). Immediately following this scene, Flanders shows a scene where old Arab women need to crawl through blocks of concrete in order to get home (**fig. 3.19**). Therefore, *Zero Degrees* draws attention to the establishment of Israel without necessarily apologizing for it. Instead, the film looks forward to help elucidate what has happened and what can be done.

When we first meet Selim, for instance, *Zero Degrees* has just transitioned from the old family footage. The old home footage has a grainy, over washed pink quality throughout the film. To draw parallels between their stories – and to perhaps reference

¹⁶⁰ Salah D. Hassan, “Displaced Nations: Israeli Settlers and Palestinian Refugees,” in *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture*, edited by Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, 186-203 (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 194.

¹⁶¹ Hassan, 189.

the term *pinkwashing* itself – Selim’s interview is edited to have that same, pink washed effect (fig. 3.20).

Homonationalism, Pinkwashing, and Orientalism

Not only do Palestinian queers face these injustice on a daily
basis and undergo Israeli oppression like any other Palestinian,
but also our name and struggle is often wrongly used and abused
to ‘Pinkwash’ Israel’s continuous crimes against the whole
Palestinian population.
- Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions¹⁶²

The term ‘pinkwashing’ was originally coined in 1985 by the group ‘Breast Cancer Action’ as a way to identify companies that claimed to support women with breast cancer while actually profiting from their illness.¹⁶³ The idea of ‘greenwashing’ was then used in 2010 to refer to companies that claim to be eco-friendly for profit.¹⁶⁴ The first time that ‘pinkwashing’ was used in relation to Palestine has been attributed to Ali Abunimah – editor of *Electronic Infidata* – in 2010 when he stated, “We won’t put up with Israel whitewashing, greenwashing, or pinkwashing.”¹⁶⁵ Pinkwashing, in this way, refers to Israeli state policies that purport to be gay-friendly and modern, washing over the occupation and atrocities against Palestinians. As stated by Marc Berthold, “The Israeli government is accused of advertising to the world a gay-friendly Tel Aviv as a hallmark of Israel, portraying itself as the only true democracy in the Middle East while diverting attention from the occupation and emphasizing homophobia in Palestinian and other Arab

¹⁶² Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions mission statement (for more information, visit <http://www.pqbds.com/2011/02/23/an-open-letter-to-queer-academics-artists-and-activists/#more-37>)

¹⁶³ Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, 135.

¹⁶⁴ Greenpeace, “Recapping on BP’s long history of greenwashing,” May 21 2010. <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/news-and-blogs/campaign-blog/recapping-on-bps-long-history-of-greenwashing/blog/26025/>, accessed July 9 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, 135.

societies.”¹⁶⁶ For some scholars and activists, it is impossible to separate perceived progressive rights of some queer persons without recognizing that their rights are dependent on the subjugation of others. To quote Gil Z. Hochberg, that the relations between “the politics of homophobia” and “the politics of occupation” are intractable.¹⁶⁷

During the 1990s, Israel’s LGBT communities saw unprecedented legal recognitions – including protection against workplace discrimination, increasing same-sex partner benefits, and greater inclusion in the Israeli Defense Forces¹⁶⁸ – while Israeli policies toward the occupied territories were creating new forms of un-recognition for Arab persons. In other words, as Rebecca Stein offers, “gay communities were enjoying new forms of social mobility within the nation-state while the literal mobility of Palestinians from the occupied territories was being increasingly curtailed.”¹⁶⁹ Pinkwashing can then be understood as a deliberate strategy to conceal or blur the violations of Palestinian human rights behind liberal Israeli gay rights. Aeyal Gross, a professor at Tel Aviv University, claims, “Gay rights have essentially become a public-

¹⁶⁶ Marc Berthold, “Pinkwashing – Wash Delicately!” *Palestine – Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 18, 2/3 (2012): 177.

¹⁶⁷ Gil Z. Hochberg, “Israelis, Palestinians, Queers: Points of Departure,” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 16, 4 (2010): 510.

¹⁶⁸ Jasbir Puar, “Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, 2 (2011): 134. There are many other sources that read Israel’s ‘progressive’ gay rights in relation to other political and concerns. See Raz Yosef’s insightful analysis of queer cinema, “Homoland: Interracial Sex and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Israeli Cinema,” *GLQ* 8 (2002): 553–80. On the legal politics of gay rights, see Alon Harel and Gideon Parchomovsky, “On Hate and Equality,” *Yale Law Journal* 109 (1999): 507–39; and Harel, “The Rise and Fall of the Israeli Legal Revolution,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 31 (2000): 443–71; on the politics of gays in the military, see Danny Kaplan and Ben-Ari Eyal, “Brothers and Others in Arms: Managing Gay Identity in Combat Units of the Israeli Army,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 29 (2002): 396–432; and Danny Kaplan, *Brothers and Others in Arms: The Making of Love and War in Israeli Combat Units* (New York: Haworth, 2003).

¹⁶⁹ Rebecca L. Stein, “Explosive: scenes from Israel’s gay occupation,” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 16,4 (2010): 521.

relations tool,” even though “conservative and especially religious politicians remain fiercely homophobic.”¹⁷⁰

In 2005, the same year that *Zero Degrees* was released, the Israeli government began its marketing campaign ‘Brand Israel’ with help from American marketing firms.¹⁷¹ According to *The Jewish Daily Forward*, the campaign aimed to establish Israel as “relevant and modern.”¹⁷² Sarah Schulman writes that Brand Israel is “a well-funded and highly orchestrated marketing campaign to sell Israel to tourists and cultural consumers, Brand Israel promotes Israel as a modern, liberal society with open values while whitewashing its human rights violations and dual citizenship systems.”¹⁷³ Specifically, the Israeli government sought to harness the gay community to enhance Israel’s global image.

The Jerusalem Post quoted ‘Stand with Us,’ a self-described Zionist organization, as saying, “We decided to improve Israel’s image through the gay community in Israel.”¹⁷⁴ Therefore, advertisements, campaigns, events, and articles were established to promote Israel as the safe-haven for LGBT persons in the Middle East. For example, Blue Star, an Israeli public relations firm, came out with numerous posters to draw LGBT persons to Israel. In ‘Gay Rights,’ (**fig. 3.21**) the poster reads: “Where in the Middle East can gay officers serve their country? Only in Israel. Support Democracy. Support Israel.”

¹⁷⁰ Sarah Schulman, “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing,’” *New York Times*, November 22 2011: A31. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html?_r=0, accessed June 28 2013.

¹⁷¹ For more detailed documentation of Brand Israel, turn to Sarah Schulman, “A Documentary Guide to Pinkwashing,” *Pretty Queer* (November 29 2011) <http://www.prettyqueer.com/2011/11/29/a-documentary-guide-to-pinkwashing-sarah-schulman-new-york-times-oped/>, accessed July 1 2013.

¹⁷² Nathaniel Popper, “Israel Aims to Improve Its Public Image,” *The Jewish Daily Forward* (October 14 2005). <http://forward.com/articles/2070/israel-aims-to-improve-its-public-image/>, accessed July 8 2013.

¹⁷³ Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, 24.

¹⁷⁴ Mel Bezalel, “Gay pride being used to promote Israel abroad,” *The Jerusalem Post* (June 7 2009). <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Gay-pride-being-used-to-promote-Israel-abroad>, accessed July 8 2013.

Palestinians are thus scripted as backward and homophobic while Israelis are modern and forward-thinking. In another Blue Star poster, viewers are convinced to join the annual Pride parade in Tel Aviv (**fig. 3.22**). This is particularly telling because in 2010, the Tel Aviv Tourism Board put forward around \$90 million to brand the city as an “international gay tourism vacation destination”¹⁷⁵ and Tel Aviv was recently named the World’s Best Gay Destination on www.gaycities.com.¹⁷⁶ In these promotions, significantly, Israel is often contrasted as a safe-haven compared to other countries in the Middle East. Sarah Schulman explain,

While homonationalism is a product of white culture and emerges unconsciously whenever white gay people (and their admirers) assimilate into racist power structures, it is not deliberate government policy. However, nowhere has homonationalism been more consciously harnessed by governments than in Israel, where the maneuvering of gay rights to support racist agendas evolved strategically from marketing impulses. This pinkwashing is a paradigm central to an understanding of queers and our relation to occupation.¹⁷⁷

Israeli Pinkwashing is thus described as part of a racist agenda because it firstly describes Arab Palestinians as backwards and repressive and it ignores Palestinian queer identities and organizations. Marc Berthold suggests “The accusation of pinkwashing is understandable when a large Israeli lesbian and gay organization presents itself as the only lifeline for persecuted Palestinian lesbians, gays and transsexuals [that] ignore Palestinian organizations such as Al-Qaws and Aswat, two courageous and important NGOs that are fighting for LGBT rights and diversity in Palestinian society in Israel and the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territories].”¹⁷⁸ Al-Qaws (The Rainbow) is a queer

¹⁷⁵ Schulman, “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing.’”

¹⁷⁶ Berthold, 178.

¹⁷⁷ Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, 135.

¹⁷⁸ Berthold, 178. Berthold also critiques, what he considers to be, the overuse of pinkwashing to examine the nuanced Israel/Palestine conflict. He states, “Support for “pinkwashing” criticism has its limits,

Palestinian group and Aswat (Voice) is a Palestinian lesbian organization. Sarah Schulman continues,

Pinkwashing not only manipulates the hard-won gains of Israel's gay community, but it also ignores the existence of Palestinian gay-rights organizations. Homosexuality has been decriminalized in the West Bank since the 1950s, when anti-sodomy laws imposed under British colonial influence were removed from the Jordanian penal code, which Palestinians follow. More important is the emerging Palestinian gay movement with three major organizations: Aswat, Al Qaws and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions.¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, in 2007, Aswat presented the *Home and Exile in Queer Experience Conference* in Palestine and over 350 people attended.¹⁸⁰

Let me be clear that this is not to say that homophobia does not exist in Palestine.¹⁸¹ But even so, there are loud, proud, and organized groups of queers and their allies in Palestine. Israeli pinkwashing attempts to disregard these facts in order to propose Israeli as the only option for LGBT people in the Middle East. However, as Haneen Maikey and Jason Ritchie note, Israel is not even an option for Palestinian LGBT people:

however, when Israeli LGBT organizations are generally accused of being agents of the government and active supporters of the occupation. They are accused of legitimizing the Israeli government's policies with their concentration on LGBT rights work" (Berthold, 179).

¹⁷⁹ Schulman, "Israel and 'Pinkwashing.'"

¹⁸⁰ For more information, look at Leslie Feinberg and Hafsa Abu Nuwas, "Palestinian Gay Women Holds Historic Conference," *Workers World* (April 12 2007) <http://www.workers.org/2007/world/aswat-0419/>, accessed July 1 2013.

¹⁸¹ Haneen Maikey (Al-Qwas member) and Jason Ritchie (Bucknell University) explain, "As in most societies, homophobia is a problem in Palestinian society, but there is not some organized, widespread campaign of violence against gay and lesbian Palestinians. Of course, there are occasional acts of violence, much like there are occasional acts of violence against queers in Western societies; and the social norms and mores about gender and sexuality that give rise to such violence create a climate in which many queer Palestinians cannot live their lives openly and honestly. At the same time, however, there are many openly gay and lesbian Palestinians, and they are not, as James Kirchick implies, an insignificant group of a "few lucky Palestinians" who are seeking asylum in Israel: they are actively engaged in changing the status quo in Palestinian society by promoting respect for sexual and gender diversity." (Haneen Maikey and Jason Ritchie, "Israel, Palestine, and Queers," *Monthly Review* (April 28 2009) <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/mr280409.html>, accessed July 1 2013.

Those of us who know a thing or two about Israel know that seeking asylum in Israel is not an option anyway for Palestinians, who are specifically ineligible for asylum under Israeli law. It may be true, as Kirchick proudly states, that Israel "legally enshrines the rights of gay people," but it enshrines only some rights for some gay people. Restricted freedom of movement, routine human rights abuses, detentions, checkpoints, and bombing campaigns are among the legally enshrined "rights" of Palestinians, whatever their sexual orientation, in the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁸²

As an example of the treatment of Palestinian queer persons in Israel, I turn to Selim in *Zero Degrees*. When we are introduced to Selim, we learn that he is a Palestinian Arab from Ramallah who does not have a permit to live in Jerusalem. Ezra explains, "Selim is my boyfriend, for almost four years now. He's from Ramallah. He's a Palestinian Arab. The problem is he can't live here, he doesn't have a permit to live here. Even though he lived in Jerusalem long before I met him. It's absurd because half of his family have Jerusalem identity cards. And all of this is the legacy of the policy to have as few Arabs here as possible with Israeli citizenship."¹⁸³ Therefore, Selim is subject to continual arrests.

We learn that his family is torn between Ramallah and Jerusalem. His immediate family has tried to move back to Jerusalem to reunite with their larger family, but they have been unable to retain permits. While Selim tells this story, the film shows 1950s footage of Israel/Palestine as the people gaze out over the beautiful scenery and sea (**fig. 3.23**) that seems free for the taking. Evidently, much has changed. Selim continues, "Ramallah is a small town. It's surrounded by fences and checkpoints. They don't let people out. Occasionally, the army goes in looking for people, saying they are terrorists and all that. They humiliate people, harass them. They oppress them."¹⁸⁴ As Selim's story

¹⁸² Maikey and Ritchie

¹⁸³ Ezra (time 9:30 – 9:58) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁸⁴ (Time: 14:37) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

of Ramallah is told in a voice over, we are stationed at a checkpoint. We see some people freely moving through the checkpoint (**fig. 3.24**) while others sit and wait (**fig. 3.25**).

Later in *Zero Degrees*, Selim also speaks about his personal difficulties with checkpoints. He states that he often takes long detours to avoid the checkpoints and he does not always make it back home. Selim explains that there are patrol officers who guard the desert too. If caught going through the desert, “They chase them and beat them and then they leave them there. It’s not worth it for me.”¹⁸⁵ Because Selim is in Jerusalem illegally, he is often arrested for minimal crimes such as throwing stones and protesting. In one particular arrest, the soldiers and border police beat him. “Why? Because I’m an Arab,”¹⁸⁶ he explains. As the film shows Selim’s injuries (**fig. 3.26**), he says that they beat him like an animal. When talking about the times that Selim has been arrested, and the humiliation that ensues for both Selim and Ezra during questioning, Ezra states: “There’s nothing you can do, this country is built to screw Arabs. The harder the better.”¹⁸⁷

Maikey and Ritchie explain that this treatment of Selim is not unique. Instead,

While Palestinians in Israel and Jerusalem are granted some legal rights and their living conditions are significantly better than in the Palestinian Territories, Palestinian citizens of Israel, whatever their sexual orientation, are second-class citizens, who face legally sanctioned and everyday discrimination and racism in all areas of life, from courtrooms and boardrooms to hospitals and universities, from the streets of small villages to the streets of Jerusalem, from the floor of the Knesset to the floors of Tel Aviv’s hippest, gayest clubs.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, Israeli pinkwashing is another method through which the particulars of Israeli occupation are reinstated: Israel is civilised and modern, Palestinians are uncivilised and barbaric. “It produces Israel as the only gay-friendly country in an

¹⁸⁵ Selim (time: 38:53) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁸⁶ (Time: 41:14) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁸⁷ Ezra (time: 43:10) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁸⁸ Maikey and Ritchie, “Israel, Palestine, Queers.”

otherwise hostile region. This has manifold effects: it denies Israeli homophobic oppression of its own gays and lesbians, of which there is plenty, and it recruits, often unwittingly, gays and lesbians of other countries into a collusion with Israeli violence towards Palestine.”¹⁸⁹ Homonationalism can thus be understood as the (symbolic) entry into citizenship and legitimacy for (some) LGBT subjects, though predicated on an anti-Muslim racism.¹⁹⁰ In *Zero Degrees*, Edit explains, “As an Ashkenazi (European Jew), I have privileges in relation to Mizrachim (Arab Jew). The same in relation to Samira.” Therefore, the film explores power disparities in relationships as they relate to national and global issues. In particular, *Zero Degrees* highlights the various ways in which Israeli persons and Palestinian persons are controlled in Israel/Palestine.

The 1950s film footage shows Israeli women, men, and children taking photographs and videos in a group. They have created the Star of David¹⁹¹ with their guns while standing in front of a border (**fig. 3.27**). Cut to the present, Ezra drives in his car with the film crew and they approach another checkpoint. Ezra then explains the politics of checkpoints. He says, “Sometimes there’s a lane for Israelis and a lane for Arabs.”¹⁹² Intertitle cards appear to further elucidate the restrictions that are placed upon Palestinian people: “According to the UN there are 482 military checkpoints dividing the West Bank into 300 regions” and “UN documents reveal that most checkpoints do not separate the

¹⁸⁹ Jasbir Puar, “Israel’s Gay Propaganda War,” *The Guardian* (July 1 2010)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/israels-gay-propaganda-war>, accessed July 29 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Jin Haritaworn, “Loyal Repetitions of the Nation: Gay Assimilation and the ‘War on Terror,’” *Dark Matter: Special Issue on Postcolonial Sexuality* 3 (2008)

<http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2008/05/02/loyal-repetitions-of-the-nation-gay-assimilation-and-the-war-on-terror/>, accessed June 29 2013.

¹⁹¹ The Star of David is a widely recognized symbol for Jewish faith and identity. With precedents since the twelfth century, the Star of David has been used in various negative and positive connotations for Jewish persons, including an association with the Holocaust. Simply, the image carries a lot of weight. Today, the Star of David can be found on the Israeli flag.

¹⁹² Ezra (Time: 36:20) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

West Bank from Israel. They block passage between Palestinian villages and cities.” The film then slowly pans out of a checkpoint (**fig. 3.28**). We are then back in Ezra’s car as he remarks that Arab persons have to walk on foot because they cannot use the roads. Old roads, he continues, have been demolished so that cars cannot use them. Instead, people have to park their cars on one side and walk across (**fig. 3.29**). Ezra notes that military jeeps often sit there so that they can see who is coming and going “...and this way they have full control.”¹⁹³

As noted previously, these conceptions of Palestinians as backwards or uncivilized are rooted in Orientalism and Othering. Jasbir Puar posits, “In reproducing Orientalist tropes of Palestinian sexual backwardness, it also denies the impact of colonial occupation on the degradation and containment of Palestinian cultural norms and values. Pinkwashing harnesses global gays as a new source of affiliation by recruiting liberal gays into a dirty bargaining of their own safety against the continued oppression of Palestinians, who are now perforce re-branded as ‘gay un-friendly.’”¹⁹⁴ Filmmaker Elle Flanders described that when she received the box of her grandparents’ footage, “it was both moving and mouth-dropping simultaneously,” she said. “I’m looking at this stuff, and all I can hear is Edward Said in the back of my head going, ‘Orientalism! Orientalism!’”¹⁹⁵ To show these historic and contemporary Orientalist parallels, *Zero Degrees* juxtaposes images of an Israeli settlement 1950s garden with, for instance, images of people walking through a checkpoint, with an Israeli flag waving in the background (**fig. 3.30**). While showing more images of checkpoints, and people moving

¹⁹³ (Time: 39:57) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁹⁴ Puar, “Citation and Censorship,” 138.

¹⁹⁵ Flanders quoted in Ann Hornaday, “Zero Degrees: Two Sides of One Reality in Israel,” *The Washington Post* (October 7 2006) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/06/AR2006100601586.html>, accessed June 28 2013.

through with their identification cards, Samira's voiceover states: "And we don't live in a state in where there's mutuality, or equality or even democracy."¹⁹⁶

Screening Politics and Closing Considerations

My existence in this land is very present, I am here – I am not anyone's ghost. I'm not apologetic at all about my presence here.

Just as they accept that this sea is the Mediterranean Sea, they should accept my existence here and that I'm an indivisible part of this land, this area, this continent.

- Samira¹⁹⁷

Zero Degrees was released the same year that Brand Israel was created, two years before Jasbir Puar coined 'homonationalism,' and five years before 'pinkwashing' was used in reference to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Nevertheless, the film subtly and complexly reveals connections between the establishment of Israel and the contemporary injustices against queer Palestinian people. In this way, *Zero Degrees* complicates ideas of homonationalism by recognizing that often theory does not fully explain messy everyday lives. In *Zero Degrees*, the 1950s aristocrats are not all evil, the contemporary Israelis are not all ignorant racists, and the contemporary Palestinians are not without blame. In its place of this simplified narrative, Flanders shows how, while some LGBT people are adopting nationalist, anti-Palestinian perspectives, others are working across borders and nationalities to break down systems of oppression. In this way, *Zero Degrees* has broad consequences for contemporary understandings of homonationalism, as it points to areas of successful engagement and also to areas that need critique and further exploration:

¹⁹⁶ Samira (time: 25:15) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

¹⁹⁷ Samira (time: 1:24:35) in *Zero Degrees of Separation*.

“The activism of LGBT people on the questions of labour, citizenship, and occupation is producing an international dynamic that has consequences for world politics.”¹⁹⁸

I first learned about this film while attending the *Homonationalism & Pinkwashing Conference* in New York City in April 2013. The filmmaker, Elle Flanders, was presenting in a panel entitled ‘The Cinema of Occupation and Resistance.’ Her talk focused on the hostility that *Zero Degrees* received when presented at various film festivals. This, she proposed, was an example of homonationalism. At queer film festivals in particular, audience members would argue that “this isn’t a gay film” because it does not include explicit queer sex. To this, Flanders responds:

I am constantly struggling with trying to suggest that it is important we look at the next generation of queer filmmaking. Do we always have to navel-gaze and just talk about ourselves and our identities? Or can we talk about ourselves in relation to the rest of the world? To me, it's really important that we stop navel-gazing, that we realize that we—as gays, lesbians, whatever—are completely connected to many different aspects of the world.¹⁹⁹

As Hoda El Shakry elaborates, “Precisely what is so ‘queer’ about *Zero Degrees of Separation* is that, despite the fact that its director and four main characters are all openly gay, it is not only about the sexuality of its characters. In staging a meeting between what appear to be temporally disparate events, Flanders’s film questions the very premise of what it means to be queer and how ‘queerness’ itself is represented.”²⁰⁰ This, to me, is exactly what makes *Zero Degrees* so compelling. Flanders does not frame these queer

¹⁹⁸ Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, 105.

¹⁹⁹ Flanders, quoted in Dalness. More information about the resistance to *Zero Degrees*, look into Amy Dalness’s “State of Removal” interview for *Alibi.com* or Isabel Kerchner, “Tolerance,” *The Jerusalem Report*, August 22 2005: 10. Flanders also gives a succinct response to these criticisms here: “I’ve been accused of being an internalized anti-Semite,” she said. “But I don’t even care anymore. It’s just such a shame we can’t have a real conversation without falling into these pits. History is what it is. Can we not critique? I think it would be better for the Jewish community if they did. I’m very adamant about that, about speaking to my own community and saying, ‘If we don’t deal with this, guys, it will be our own demise.’” (Quoted in Hornaday)

²⁰⁰ El Shakry, 618.

stories exclusively through the lens of sexuality; instead, *Zero Degrees* shows that identity, nation, and history are all intertwined.

Figures



Fig. 3.01 *Zero Degrees Title* (film still, 00:06:59). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.02 *Arriving Off the Plane* (film still, 00:07:18). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.03 Bus Tour (film still, 00:19:57). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.04 Soldiers and Blindfolded Man (film still, 01:13:00). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.05 Soldier Landing (film still, 01:16:53). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.06 Soldier Throwing (film still, 01:16:55). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.07 *Saved the Life of My Family* (film still, 00:33:29). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.08 *Mourning* (film still, 00:35:12). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.09 1948 (film still, 00:10:17). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.10 Man on Street (film still, 00:11:29). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.11 Man on Street: Woman Laughs (film still, 00:11:32). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.12 Yemen Camp: Without Shoes (film still, 00:17:28). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.13 Yemen Camp: Surrounding Children (film still, 00:18:00). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.14 Rejection of The Orient (film still, 00:18:42). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.15 Rejection of the Orient: Now Walking (film still, 00:18:53). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.16 Camel on Side of Road (film still, 00:20:02). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.17 Photos with Soldiers (film still, 00:46:37). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.18 Children in Background (film still, 00:46:30). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.19 Crawling Through (film still, 00:51:18). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.20 Introducing Selim (film still, 00:12:55). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.

Where In The Middle East Can Gay Officers Serve Their Country?



Only in Israel

In a democracy, positions of leadership and political office are open to all citizens, no matter their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

The Israeli Declaration of Independence guarantees all citizens freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, culture, and equal access to holy sites.

Support Democracy. Support Israel.

blueStarPR
The Israeli Tel Aviv
www.bluestarpr.com

Fig. 3.21 Gay Rights. Blue Star PR marketing campaign poster. Courtesy of Blue Star PR. [<http://www.bluestarpr.com/military-gay-rights-israel.html>].

Celebrate Pride in Israel



Israel is one of the most "gay friendly" countries in the world. Israel is progressive regarding LGBT rights:

- Allows LGBT citizens to openly serve in all ranks in the military
- Recognizes foreign same-sex marriages.

The annual Pride parade in Tel Aviv is the largest in the entire Mediterranean basin. But it's not just Lesbians and Gays who attend — the parade attracts a lot of other cheering spectators as well.

Visit Israel and join us!

blueStar

Fig. 3.22 Celebrate Pride in Israel. Blue Star PR marketing campaign poster. Courtesy of Blue Star PR. [<http://www.bluestarpr.com/Celebrate-Pride-In-Israel.html>].



Fig. 3.23 *Free for the Taking* (film still, 00:00:29). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.24 *Checkpoint: Walking* (film still, 00:14:15). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.25 Checkpoint: Waiting (film still, 00:14:31). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.26 Selim's Injuries (film still, 00:41:33). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.27 Star of David (film still, 00:35:36). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.28 Checkpoint (film still, 00:38:25). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.29 *'Arab Road'* (film still, 00:40:28). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.



Fig. 3.30 *We don't live in a mutuality* (film still, 00:25:17). *Zero Degrees of Separation*, written and directed by Elle Flanders (Canada: Graphic Pictures, Inc./The National Film Board of Canada, 2005). DVD.

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Conclusion

You don't have to get normal to become legitimate.

- Judith Butler²⁰¹

In our neoliberal society, access into conservative institutions often seems to be the only way to gain social and economic recognition. However, as Butler notes above, approval does not *only* come from normalcy. Instead, new areas of feminist, queer, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist critique have begun to make us question the costs of legitimacy and in fact celebrate non-normative and non-regulatory modes of thinking and being. It is in this discussion that I have situated my thesis.

This project has revisited three relatively well-known case studies using recent theoretical writings. I have not only consolidated various theorists' perspectives, along with my own, to validate my claims, but also undertaken primary research in the form of interviews with the artists and curators involved. Despite their divergent interactions with homonationalism, these three case studies complement and complicate each other.

Queering the Canon: Museum Politics and Hide/Seek at the Smithsonian showed that homonationalist trends have extended into museum spaces. Following the plight of curator and scholar Johnathan D. Katz as he attempted to show a queer exhibition at a major institution, this article continued an investigation of homonationalism in the United States. Katz attempted to work from within the canon, and homonationalist projects, to eventually create *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. Through various struggles with institutions, artists estates, museums, galleries, and academic settings, it became evident, however, that *Hide/Seek's* possibilities were limited. Therefore, the first article of this thesis uncovered the homonationalist predisposition of mainstream art institutions in the United States.

²⁰¹ Interview with Judith Butler, quoted in Regina Michalik, "The Desire for Philosophy," *LOLA Press*. http://www.lolapress.org/elec2/artenglish/butl_e.htm, accessed July 4 2013.

Moving north to Canada, in the second article – entitled *Colonial Queeries: Centering a Two-Spirit Critique of Homonationalism* – I used a Two-Spirit critique to explain how settler homonationalism operates. Within exhibition spaces, Kent Monkman's paintings, which incorporate Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, have the radical political potential to denaturalize homonationalism. Miss Chief Eagle Testickle infiltrates the canon of Western art to defamiliarize familiar spaces and faces, promote frivolity, and implicate the viewer. As Monkman's paintings have become more and more popular, moreover, his artworks bring this critique to mainstream art world audiences. As such, Monkman's contemporary paintings have broad ramifications for the inextricably linked historical interactions with First Nations persons and contemporary understandings of sexuality and nationhood.

In *(Pink)Washing the Conflict in Zero Degrees of Separation*, the final article of this thesis, I introduced another aspect of homonationalism: pinkwashing. In this 2005 film – the earliest case study of the thesis – Elle Flanders brings together historical and contemporary knowledges to elucidate the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through persons caught up in it. *Zero Degrees* in this way directly critiques homonationalism and pinkwashing through an exploration of the privileges of Israelis and the oppression of Palestinians under these current conditions. Her interactions with Ezra, Selim, Edit, and Samira have brought their stories to the fore in a way to better understand personal and political intersections.

Upon reflection, I realized that each case study combines historical documents and contemporary theory. As is the nature of our discipline, *Hide/Seek* brought forward decades-old portraits, and reinterpreted them with a new awareness of (homo)sexual desire, Monkman's paintings drew together historical landscape paintings, modern

canonical images, and a postmodern character that turns these narratives on their head, and *Zero Degrees* aligned 1950s home footage with 2002 documentary footage to unravel a contemporary Occupation. Similarly, each case study has brought these stories to national and international audiences to open up new conversations.

However, each example had not previously been analysed through the lens of homonationalism, nor had they been brought together before. By incorporating three different art practices – a museum exhibition, an artist’s paintings, and a documentary film – I have broadened my scope of analysis to better understand homonationalism in various places, times, and mediums. Furthermore, each case study helps us to better understand the others. The trend of assimilation politics in the United States can help us to better understand pinkwashing in Israel. An investigation into Brand Israel can more thoroughly explain homonormative plights of citizenship in the United States and Canada. Similarly, an analysis of settler homonationalism in Canada can further unpack homonationalist tendencies in the United States and Israel because they are both, too, settler states.

By applying this theory to very different but, of course, related areas of visual culture, it is my hope that this thesis has generated an examination of homonationalism that sheds light on how queer theory can help us better unpack particular art practices. Ultimately, though, every one of these case studies holds substantial room for further inquiry. For example, in *Hide/Seek*, the difference between contractual stipulations for male and female nudity, the AA Bronson removal request and denial, the subsequent film screening of Wojnarowicz’s *A Fire in My Belly* at the same institutions that refused to hold the show, and the new way in which homophobia must be hidden under religious rights are just some of the many further areas of exploration. Kent Monkman’s work also

holds many areas of consideration that could not be thoroughly examined here. This includes his use of modern art styles, the reception of his work based on curatorial decisions (in historical or contemporary museum spaces), and the use of Miss Chief in performances and films. Likewise, in regard to *Zero Degrees of Separation*, a more thorough consideration of Orientalist tropes in the Morrison's footage and the film screening politics would shed light on homonationalist tendencies and the evolving nature of contemporary queer cinema. As a result, I see this thesis as an introduction to new modalities of talking about homonationalism.

Although visual culture studies has incorporated queer theory into contemporary analyses, the focus has been devoted to examinations of specific artists (i.e., this artist is queer so their work is queer) or queer sexuality in art works (e.g., Renaissance paintings of homoeroticism). Surprisingly, a study of homonationalism, in the sphere of visual culture, has not been undertaken. As such, this project opens the door to considering how this concept manifests in contemporary art practices, as a way to better understand and better critique homonationalism. In this way, this thesis is situated in queer theory discourse, but also contributes to opening up new avenues for art theory.

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